Chrome Shelled Regios Volume14

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These are novel illustrations that were included in volume 14

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●あまぎしゅうすけ

第15回ファンタジア長編小説大賞佳作「マテリアルナイト　少女は巨人と踊る」でデビュー。広島県在住。暑い！　と叫んでもこれが発売されるのは九月だ。なんか理不尽だ。というわけで食欲の秋だったりするのか。一応旅行を予定してるが美味いもん食べてたりしてるのか？　忘れるな、お前はダイエット中だということを！（未来の自分への警告）

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鋼殻のレギオス14
スカーレット・オラトリオ

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鋼殻のレギオス14
スカーレット・オラトリオ

疾走る。四方から放たれる敵意と衝剄。矢のように降り注ぐそれらを弾き返しながら、レイフォンは、グレンダンの大地を突き進む。
「リーリン！」
確かめる為に。孤児院で共に育った少女……さよならさえ告げずに去ってしまった幼なじみの、本当の気持ちを確かめる為に。
遂にグレンダンの地に降り立ったレイフォン。栄光と挫折が交錯する故郷で、敵となったかつての武芸者を撃退し進む中、レイフォンは捨てたはずの過去と対面する。時同じく、都市を飲み込む巨大な異形から生まれ続ける汚染獣を前に天剣たちは死闘を繰り広げていた。そして女王がその力を解放する瞬間が近づき……！

ファンタジア文庫
雨木シュウスケ作品集

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「やっぱりあんたか」
VEIR ZEIN
鋼殻のレギオス
CHROME SHELLED REGIOS
14 スカーレット・オラトリオ

「地獄へようこそ

天剣授受者の放つ
剄の波動だけで
都市が鳴動する。

「来ます」
――これが始まりなのだ

Prologue

She had not forgotten the feeling left on her lips.

The sound of the city's multi-legs moving. It was time for the roaming bus to depart. Leerin had picked out all the luggage beside his feet. The jacket he wore, the top he wore, the pants, the shoes, had all been chosen by Leerin.

The weather of that day was so good that one might hate it, as if it was there to bless his journey. There were many reasons why filth monsters appeared. The level of pollutants was related, but the air on that day was especially crisp and fresh. Filth monsters usually wouldn't appear under those situations, so it was the best day for a roaming bus to leave. Till that day, the departure date had been pushed back. She had wanted that day to never come, because the day signified separation.

It might be a separation for eternity.

She had thought so, and that thought might even have been right.

Until the day she received the box from her adoptive father.

The katana of Psyharden. It was the symbol of the heir to the school of Psyharden. It was proof that he had forgiven Layfon and reconciled with him. Though Grendan still couldn't accept Layfon, Layfon's foster father still wished to maintain a connection with him. There was someone who wished for this besides Leerin.

This was also an opportunity for Leerin to take action. She had been living a life different from her past. Originally, she would hesitate before giving up than hang on. She was about to give up many times, but this sudden opportunity had given her stubbornness another victory.

She recalled once again the feeling left on her lips.

At that time when the sound of the city's movement suddenly stopped, when something pressed hard on her back, that moment must have meant something.

She just wanted herself to be left in his memory for a little longer.

She wanted the existence of Leerin Marfes to stay longer in his memory. This thought was with her as she acted.

That was how she wanted it to be.

But, this action..... Why did she wish for him to remember her? Because her lover was about to leave her?

Or.....

She recalled the feeling left on her lips.

The long journey to Zuellni had ended. When she saw him covered in wounds, that feeling rushed up to her chest. She couldn't resist it.

Why did he turn out like this?

Why did he turn out like this but she wasn't beside him? Because she couldn't stay by his side? This was so cruel. She felt pain in her chest. Her tears fell. Unstoppable. She regretted it. She had never hated herself so much, she who lacked imagination and consideration. This place wasn't Grendan. She only knew, after leaving Grendan, how blessed and strange a place it was.

She only knew of him the side she knew..... She had never thought of the Layfon who would give up Military Arts. She had never thought of the cruelty of reality. As she never had to participate in the cruel fights, she had never thought of it.

So foolish.

The feeling on her lips.

She was trapped in confusion, and then three months flew by. She had been observing him, trying to answer the question of whether he was fortunate or not to live as a Military Artist. He was using his busy life as an excuse to escape her. The number of roaming buses had been drastically reduced during wartime, and that had become her excuse to stay by his side.

What was Leerin Marfes thinking at that time?

Finally prepared to give him the box, and he had accepted it. Why was Leerin Marfes happy?

She decided to give him the box after observing and deciding he was living a good life in Zuellni. It was the Katana of Psyharden that her foster father had given her.

Layfon had obtained forgiveness.

Then what had Leerin gained? The fact that the connection between the two of them wasn't lost? That Layfon hadn't forgotten Grendan and Leerin Marfes? Or..... the fact that there was a special relationship between Leerin Marfes and Layfon Alseif? But even so, this was just on the surface. Was there another reason in a deeper area? Was there a much more personal and willful reason behind it? And what should she do now that she had noticed it? What should she do?

But the magic in her right eye beneath the blindfold could see the truth that she was Leerin Eutnohl. In her ran the blood of the three royal families of Grendan, and from it came a special power.

This was her proof, her proof of her real father and mother.

And this truth became much brighter before her right eye.

The chaos in Grendan. What should she do?

"Leerin!!"

His voice called for her.

This made her chest hurt even more.....

Chapter 1: You still haven't made any decision

Running.

With the sound of the wind in his ears, Layfon kept running and jumping. Holding the Sapphire Dite in the form of steel threads, he carried Felli with his left arm. Carrying the delicate and tiny her, he kept running and jumping. He pressed on as he moved upon Grendan's earth.

"Layfon Alseif!"

The voice filled with hostility echoed everywhere. Directed at Layfon, the voice seemed like arrows coming in all directions. The confrontation with Claribel had created an unexpected result. The chaos continued to spread even now, rippling out in bigger circles. The chaos never once stopped around Layfon. Having made the spark in Grendan's urgent air, he could never predict just how large a fire was to emerge in Grendan. Right now, he could do nothing but run.

"Three new Military Artists have appeared at point 1200," Felli said next to his ear. She hugged his neck tightly, her breath brushing past his ear. The tension that one couldn't feel in her flake was now carried through by her breath.

The steel threads danced. No, it had never once stopped from the beginning. Layfon kept deflecting the external Kei of Military Artists aimed at his back, using the steel threads to stop these guys

from getting closer, and making them faint. Felli had been searching for a safe place. In order to enable Sharnid to keep running, Layfon had put all his concentration in the fight.

For the three Military Artists forming a net to stop him, they didn't even have time to release external Kei before Layfon hammered them into unconsciousness.

"After 100m, please turn to point 1400 and move for 200m."

Layfon kept moving forward at Felli's direction, but it was very difficult. He was only defeating the other Military Artists..... It'd have been much more relaxing to kill them off, but he didn't choose that method. Instead, he made them unconscious to stop them from pursuing him. If he had chosen to kill, he'd probably have chopped off Claribel's head in the second move.

Why did he not do that? Why didn't he kill them? Even Layfon himself couldn't find a persuasive answer to those questions. But for some reason, he just couldn't kill them. He had made a decision in one split second. Even if he changed his thinking now, something in his heart would hold back his resolve.

But.....

".....Uu!"

The external Kei of nearing Military Artists ran through the steel threads to his wrist. Though it'd be easier to block the attack if he were to spread the steel threads around like Lintence, he had no spare time for that now. He couldn't perform that move in a flash

like that person. The steel threads were a very good weapon against many enemies, but Layfon's strength was far from Lintence's. He wouldn't have sunk into this desperate a situation if he could concentrate fighting on his own, but.....

"Hey!"

Sharnid's voice came from behind.

"Even though we keep running, we still can't escape the Psychokinesist's search?"

This was Sharnid, who could speak with his usual attitude in this unusual situation. Layfon agreed with his words, but even he himself could do nothing. He had no strength left.

As Sharnid had said.

The flakes of Psychokinesists flew among the Military Artists so to capture Layfon's movements. Though he could destroy the flakes flying inside the net of steel threads, strong Psychokinesists' power could glean information even if the flakes were far from their target. Under normal circumstances, Layfon could increase the range of steel threads to destroy farther flakes, but it was impossible to do so while escaping and fighting numerous enemies. The current range took everything he could to maintain its delicate operation. Putting all of his concentration on operating the steel threads, he had left the choice of the route to Felli. If he hadn't done that, he would have already left openings in his defense.

One must never underestimate Grendan's Military Artists. This was a city that had much more real battle experience than any other cities. A city that had experienced many organized group battles more than any other cities. No matter what the situation was, it could even easily work with any strangers to carry out combined attacks. This was because if the city couldn't do that much, Grendan's Military Artists would not have survived this long. Layfon was protecting Sharnid and Felli. If he wasn't careful with his moves, they would have been defeated by Grendan's Military Artists before meeting Nina, Leerin and any other Heaven's Blade successors.

"I have an idea," Felli's voice sounded in their ears. Tension seeped from her voice.

"As such, please head for the destination. If possible when we arrive there, even just a moment is enough, we'll completely disappear from their eyes."

"Is that possible?" Sharnid asked.

"If I have time to weave the steel threads formation....." Layfon could only reply. He needed time to prepare Lintence's steel threads move – Sougen Kyoku, as his technique wasn't as good as Lintence's. Besides, the more numerous the enemies, the harder it was to control the move, but simultaneously, the power and scale of the move was even larger. Just speaking of weapon type, Dinn's metal threads was the same type as the steel threads. The level of difficulty to wield this type of weapon was high, and it was easier to understand that the more familiar one was with this weapon, the more horrific its power.

To weave a formation in a split second like Lintence..... Not only would Layfon fail to produce Sougen Kyoku, he might even create an opening. Any opening in this situation was fatal.

"Good. Just leave it to me."

He never thought Sharnid would accept this mission so quickly.

"Ah.....?"

"Even so, we only have 10 seconds. Please, I don't want to get careless."

"Eh? But....."

He did not give voice to the words in his throat. Perhaps he was worrying too much, but no matter how much he worried, this was reality. Layfon wasn't the exception. All Military Artists in Grendan were the same, and it was particularly so for the Psyharden who had never forgotten the feeling in a real battle.

But he had to say it now.

"Senpai, it's impossible for you."

Even so.

He failed to say it.

Why?

But there was no time to ask himself anymore.

"Got it," Felli replied instead.

"Felli-senpai....."

"There's no time for discussion. First, we've to escape."

This truly was what they needed but.....

"Ok, then let's start three seconds before we arrive at the destination. Though I don't know what move it is, please remember don't get me caught in it."

"....."

No time to reply. They were about to arrive at the destination. There were around 130 pursuers. Around 50 flakes were trying to circle the intruders. Two to three people were Psychokinesists. Layfon felt that clearly and found the number unexpectedly low. His confrontation with Claribel had sparked a fire in Grendan, and that fire would certainly spread. But with this number, rather than allowing Sharnid to encounter danger, Layfon still couldn't make a decision.....

"I....."

Let me do it. That was what he wanted to say. With this level of Military Artists, Layfon could defeat them if he were to kill them. However, Felli didn't permit him to speak.

"Fon Fon..... Please be more honest."

"Eh?"

"We must stop the source of fire to prevent this situation from worsening. Only 1 more second till arrival.....Action. Start."

"Oi!" Sharnid shouted and turned around behind Layfon.

Layfon had already eliminated all Military Artists ahead of him, so the targets left were all behind him. There were 30 Military Artists, and they were all different from Zuellni's Military Arts students. Though Sharnid was a top Military Artist in Zuellni, his action here was brainless. Would the future of a few seconds after, change because of his action? Layfon should stop him. Stop his brainless action, but it was too late. They had promised to buy him 10 seconds. Holding the Dite, Layfon considered whether he should change the direction of the steel threads.

But why?

Why did he feel that something unexpected would happen? Was it really all right to simply concentrate on weaving the formation? The formation he needed formed in Layfon's head and became an image. How to swing the Dite, how to let the Kei run, how to adjust the Kei through his Kei vein. All these points had clearly emerged in his mind. All that was left was to realize them in reality.

Once Sougen Kyoku was put into action, it wouldn't stop till it was finished. This was how deep and complicated Lintence's move was. All parts of the move were complicated and strange. It had

taken him a horrific amount of time to just familiarize himself with the weapon. There was a reason why there were fewer steel threads users than Karen Kei users. Luckens' secret was also difficult but it was still just physical exercise.....the steel threads were different. The difference of threads, the flow of Kei, the ripples of Kei, everything were of a high level.

Concentrate. If he got distracted, he'd fail.

It had begun.

One second.

"Here I go!" Sharnid shouted and rushed for the Military Artists .

"Restoration!"

The two guns in his hands were restored. Close quarters combat gun fighting.....Using guns for close combat fight, Sharnid had raised the guns and rushed the thirty Military Artists in order to protect himself. He blocked off the external Kei from them.

Two seconds.

The explosion broke through the sky along with a huge noise. The air flow was scattered into pieces as a huge wave swallowed Sharnid whole. This was a group strategy created to stop in-rushing larvae. The dignity of adults was sullied today for having used this move against one single person, a person who was still an immature Military Artist.

Only the light of external Kei and the dust of explosion floating in the air remained in Sharnid's sight.

Three seconds.

An even bigger feeling of Kei came from behind his back. A heavy pressure that easily overwhelmed the Kei of all thirty Military Artists. No matter how he thought of it, he knew it came from Layfon. If not, an even more terrible character must have appeared behind Sharnid, Layfon and Felli.

(No way?)

Holding to that belief, he stood again in the arena that he couldn't escape from. He believed that his action would turn the situation around.

"Sometimes I have to show you the dignity of a senpai!" he shouted as his spirit rose.

Four seconds.

Grendan's Military Artists calmly calculated the result of their external Kei. They felt nothing for the end of the Military Artist who had been protected by Layfon. They had a general idea of this person's strength by looking at the way he escaped, his running speed, his leaping height, his pose. They thought his action was brainless and so they released their moves. Standing in a battle, an unsafe arena as they faced an enemy, what should they do? This was common sense. Even though this fool was a Military Arts student, they were not his teacher. They had no obligation to point out his foolish action.

The external Kei had already ground this person into powder as if he was put into a blender. That was what the Military Artists thought.

But that did not happen.

The sound of gunshots pierced through the sound of explosion. The prediction went awry in the next moment. Numerous shots of light assaulted them, breaking through the attacks of the thirty Military Artists. This time, the rain of Kei bullets came to baptize these Military Artists.

Five seconds.

The safety setting of the weapon was released. This wasn't permitted in the platoon matches and the Military Arts

Competition. The bullets he used there were anesthetic. In here, Sharnid could choose to use both real and Kei bullets. When the weapon's safety setting was on, he could not use Kei bullets. Though real bullets were powerful too, the number was limited. However, there was no limit to the number of Kei bullets. Sharnid just had to keep compressing his Kei and shooting it out. The quality of the gun had placed a certain amount of restriction on the power output, but as long as he had Kei, he could keep on shooting.

"OHHHHHHHHH!" Sharnid voiced as he kept shooting. He wasn't just shooting. He was moving too. He moved to find the locations that he could shoot the bullets through the amorphous wave of external Kei.

"Haha!"

Even he himself didn't expect it..... The ambush was very successful. In fact, there were few Military Artists who failed to evade the sudden attacks.

Six seconds.

He had reduced the number from thirty to twenty but he couldn't let his guard down. He could feel new Military Artists closing in.

"But you're a bit late."

The Military Artists dispersed and formed a circle around Sharnid. Sharnid rushed for them.

Different kinds of weapons attacked him. To them, Sharnid was no longer a simple Military Arts student.

Seven seconds.

Sharnid's contribution was unbelievable. Though he did it in an emergency situation, he had accurately grasped hold of the opening through his experience in numerous battles. He had not fallen for the trap but managed to shoot out Kei bullets accurately. This was different from his random shooting at the beginning of the fight. As such, he defeated three more Military Artists.

Eight and nine seconds.

Continuously attacking was tiring. His movements had slowed down. Though the time was short, he kept on attacking.

And then ten seconds passed.

"I'm counting on you."

Sharnid escaped from the position of shooting Kei bullets everywhere and ran for Layfon. The Military Artists were speechless at his action of leaving his back completely exposed. This might be a trap. They considered whether to give chase or not .

Less than even one second had already decided their fate.

Sougen Kyoku – Needle makeup.

The result took place in a flash. The Military Artists and all the Psychokinesis flakes that were gathering information around them suffered the same fate.

They were pierced in a flash.

Invisible steel threads were laid across the earth during Sharnid's fight with the Military Artists. These threads suddenly all pierced the sky. The heads of the threads enlarged with the Kei in them. None of the Military Artists could resist them. Even the flakes had become the steel threads' prey, pierced one by one. This happened to not only the Military Artists fighting Sharnid, but to all other Military Artists and flakes seeking to get close. The impact and pain caused by steel threads was enough. The Military Artists didn't have time to make any noise before fainting. Layfon had controlled the threads so they didn't pierce any vital spots.

"Keep going down," Felli said as Sharnid arrived. The three of them went into the underground canal and closed the heavy lid above them.

It was pitch black.

"This isn't a bad idea but....." Sharnid walked ahead of the team with a painful expression. Felli was in the middle and Layfon took up the rear. The three of them were walking in the underground canal. Sharnid made this expression not only because of Layfon. Felli herself understood it well. As a huge amount of water flowed underground, the sound of rushing water was enough to drown out the noise of Layfon's team, but they still couldn't speak too loudly without regard of anything.

"So smelly," Sharnid complained, holding his nose.

This underground canal was used to carry away waste water.

"No need to repeat what we all know," Felli said. She wasn't all that comfortable either.

Even Layfon was the same. Though Internal Kei system could strengthen his senses, he deliberately chose not to strengthen his sense of smell. Still, the foul smell kept invading his nostrils, causing a nasty feeling in the depth of his throat.

"If there's a better way to escape, please tell me."

"I'm sorry. I'm not blaming you, Felli-chan."

"Of course."

"The entrance we used is destroyed. It'd be hard for our pursuers to follow, but I'm not sure about the Psychokinesists."

"It's all right. It's already hard to investigate this place from above the ground. Besides, I'm interfering with the flakes and making them get error messages."

"You're making the flakes make the wrong judgment? Incredible. If you can do that, why haven't you been using it? If Nina had known, she'd be mad."

"Not that I haven't used it before. I didn't know how to use it till now..... Recently, I've thought of this method. At that time when I took over the other person's flake....."

"So Felli-chan's been thinking."

"....."

"You said you hated it, but you gradually came to like it? Not bad."

"Go die, perv."

"Speaking of which, you two can really talk."

Layfon was trying all he could not to breathe. It was unbelievable to see these two converse. In addition, the three of them were keeping Kei flowing in order to stay in their Kei state.

"Well, this situation won't change even if we don't say anything.
"

"I was mentally prepared when we chose this escape route."

"But then....."

Layfon sighed, following closely behind the two. Felli directed them when they came to a branch. Layfon put all his concentration behind them.

No one was chasing them. He focused his Kei in his ears. He heard footsteps that sounded like Military Artists, but he could tell they weren't all that near. Felli was choosing the safest route for them.

It should be okay..... to relax a little in these circumstances?

"Speaking of which, the situation turned worse immediately. I originally planned for us to sneak in more safely."

"It seems difficult if you know too many people," Felli said, her gaze stabbing Layfon.

"This is his home, but I never thought so many beauties would come to greet him," Sharnid laughed.

Felli's gaze turned sharper.

"Though you instantly bloodied the other person, that's really like your style. What else can I say?"

"Then..... Who is she?"

"Eh?"

"That girl named Claribel. How are you two related?"

"No. Nothing special. I don't think I've fought with her together that many times....."

Of all that he remembered of her, Claribel belonged to one of the three royal families. She was a daughter of the Ronsmier family , the granddaughter of the Heaven's Blade successor Tigris.

"Then isn't she a lady? If you had stayed in Grendan, you might have been promoted."

"Impossible."

Layfon knew it was impossible but the hostility he felt from Felli was deepening.

"You two saw it, right?"

Claribel had suddenly attacked with a sword. That kind of girl can't have any good feelings towards him.

"No no. I didn't feel any hostility. It felt more like an action devoid of any evil intention."

Sharnid's words triggered his memories. True. There was no hostility in Claribel's action. He thought she was here to punish the

exiled..... But he didn't feel that was her intention. Perhaps she only came to try out his strength. This kind of Military Artists was not lacking in Grendan.

"She likes you."

A mischievous smile from Sharnid.

"No..... That's just a way to measure her strength....."

Layfon's expression was troubled. Felli's fury increased.

"So nothing else happened between you two?"

"Huh?"

"NO-THING ELSE! From what she said, it seems something's happened between you two in the past."

"Nothing special..... Well, the only thing I remember was when she first participated in a battle. I went along as an observer."

"Observer?"

"Well, an experienced Military Artist has to accompany any new Military Artists in their first battle. He's there to observe and protect the newbie. My adopted father accompanied me when I first headed off, but for some reason, Tigris requested me to go with her....."

Sharnid snapped his fingers. "You must have helped her in a cool style."

"Uh? Not that cool. That battle turned into a long one unexpectedly. She didn't control the use of her strength and fainted. I took care of everything afterwards."

"Look. As expected."

Felli's gaze was icy.

"Why didn't you realize....."

"Eh?"

"Give it up. Even this clumsy guy is a Heaven's Blade."

"Really....."

Layfon didn't understand them and cocked his head.

The three of them kept on moving. Felli's direction was very accurate. The sound of their pursuers was getting further and further away.

"We'll head up here," Felli said this after an hour.

"Finally. My clothes and hair smell foul!" Sharnid smelled his long hair and made a helpless expression.

"I'll go up first."

Layfon climbed the ladder, pushed open the heavy lid and stood up on the ground to check everything was safe. He then pulled Felli and Sharnid up with the steel threads.

No one was around.

They seemed to be in the third residential area..... Though there was no evacuation siren ringing, it was rare to see the sun so high in the sky during this hour.

The three of them finally let out their breath. Perhaps a majority of Military Artists had already given up the search. As Felli had said, their disappearance had reduced the passion of the Military Artists.

"Speaking of which, just what's going on?"

Perhaps just as the conversation went in the underground canal, Claribel just wanted to challenge Layfon and held no hostility towards him. However, that made the actions of the Military Artists incomprehensible. It felt as if the tightly-held string suddenly broke and caused a huge ruckus. A fight had happened not long before, but why were they so tense?

No.....

"Has it not ended?"

"What are you talking about?"

Sharnid placed the lid back. Felli's icy gaze was still on Layfon. It seemed the conversation about Claribel had cast her into a bad mood, and she hadn't recovered from it.

Layfon was the one who was teased. Why was Felli in such a bad mood? He didn't get it. But if he asked her, she'd get madder... ...

"What is it?"

"Nothing. Just wondering about the huge ruckus....."

"I don't know but it's not strange under that circumstance. Right ?"

That circumstance.

The contact between Zuellni and Grendan. The contact between an Academy City and a normal city. The crowd of filth monsters suddenly appearing in Zuellni's sky. All these were extremely unusual circumstances. Since they discovered the Haikizoku in the ruined city with the 5th platoon, the unusual circumstance had not once stopped. Had it all been decided that things would turn out this way?

"Okay, let's go," Sharnid walked over to them.

"Wait a minute. A normal person's leaving his home at point 0900....."

"Hey, don't say that now!"

"Can't be helped. I was concentrating on the Military Artists. We've to avoid him."

"Can we make it, Layfon?"

"Let's go."

"Ah....."

He could tell from Felli's words that they couldn't make it. The sound of Felli and a door opening weaved together.

Even so, they'd make it if they moved immediately. The female walked out of the house. She was looking at her feet, holding the handle and did not notice Layfon. They could still make it now if he were to carry Felli. Sharnid was good at fast movement, so he had nothing to worry about.

But Layfon did not move.

The person who walked out of the house was a female. Her hair was delicate and had been cut to a very short length. Her head was lowered as her hair willfully allowed the gravity to pull it lower.

Layfon saw the fine hair and shoulders, and the shopping basket in her hand.

Only he understood.

"Eh.....?" She lifted her head and saw them. Then she looked at Layfon, disbelieving.

"Layfon.....?"

"Lucia-nee.....san"

His head hurt. Not because he was sick. This hurt came from his mental exhaustion. He couldn't say anything at the end of helplessness. He just felt his head hurt.

"Really....."

Minse pressed a hand down on his temple. He had watched his younger cousin lie on the bed with a helpless expression. In the end, he did not return to the palace but had instead headed for the outer edge. He had carried his cousin who had her arm cut off to the hospital. He hated himself for having done it.

Besides, a simple recovery device was holding his cousin's right wrist firmly as she lay on the bed even in this situation. She didn't look pained. Instead, she looked rather happy.

But it was better than being looked at with a dejected expression. Still, his cousin's expression prevented him from feeling satisfied and at peace for having rescued an injured person. All he felt now was the feeling of having done something foolish.

"Ahah..... As I thought, Layfon is the best."

His cousin must be thinking of this repeatedly? For those people who took advantage of the Gahard incidence to exile Layfon from the city, his cousin must have wanted to make them feel bad.

"I've trained with that move for a long time and I was confident about it. But as I thought, it's still far from complete."

"No. Isn't it because you were toying with them but they took out their real strength?"

His cousin was caressing the recovery device. Looking at her vague expression, Minse had no other feeling than that her cousin was dangerous. Though she wasn't mad about fighting like Savaris , as expected, she was dangerous when Layfon was involved. The close age gap between them was only one of the reasons. But it seemed she had already noticed Layfon before she had her first battle. Her feelings for Layfon after the first battle was mixed in with something else.

Minse found it strange that it wasn't a feeling a normal female would have.

"That's not related. What is truly needed is a very balanced strength that can be fully utilized no matter the situation. If it's only strength exploded from a person in a crisis, then he can't beat anyone."

"I can't hear the real reason."

"I said that's it."

Minse looked at his cousin who was nodding strongly. He turned his silent gaze to the scenery outside the window.

It was very tiring for Minse to discuss the theory of battle. He was a Military Artist who didn't possess any great power. One could say that he had given up because he hadn't undergone any fast growth. The fight with the Wolf Faces back then made his body heavy. Claribel had gone on a rampage just when he wanted to take a rest. Thinking of the words Her Majesty and other people would say only added to his exhaustion. There was nothing that could heal him.

".....Anyway, the commotion seems to have died down. It appears they have successfully hidden themselves."

The commotion that had gone on for quite a while had died down. Minse didn't think Layfon was defeated as he hadn't felt a Kei stronger than a Heaven's Blade successor. This meant Layfon and his comrades had hidden themselves. Though he wasn't that happy with Layfon, the commotion had not spread. That was good news in this situation. Anything happening right now was not normal. Something huge would certainly take place later. The action of the Wolf Faces had pointed to it. Instead of finding the path to the Inner Court as usual, the Wolf Faces had directly taken a mission to assassinate the Heaven's Blades..... The more correct reason was that they wanted to eliminate the power of the

Heaven's Blade successors. Their purpose must be preventing the Heaven's Blades from exercising their full strength in the coming battle.

What he was sure of was that something huge was about to occur.

A huge ruckus at this time wasn't welcome. Minse and the others didn't have the strength to stop Layfon so it was better to honestly let him in.

"Anyway, you ought to stay here and receive treatment."

"I know. If my wrist isn't put back the right way, I can't do anything I want. Aa, but I still want to fight one more time. I heard it can be treated by dusk. One more time....."

Minse shook his head and left the room. As he left, he thought he wanted to return earlier but it had to be at this time that he met the person who halted his steps.

"What an unexpected meeting."

Minse failed to utter a word as this was a very special person. The peaceful atmosphere exuding from this person didn't crack apart as the person watched Minse from the wheelchair. It was impossible for this old lady not to know Minse was here.

He tried to speak with the old woman.

"It's unusual to see you, Delbone-dono."

This was the hospital Delbone slept in. Not only that. Savaris, who had sustained injuries in Zuellni, was treated here too. Though it wasn't impossible to meet with her in this hospital, the old lady before Minse had always been sleeping, acting through her power of Psychokinesis alone. Hence Minse never thought he'd meet the real person.

"Hoho. One of my grandchildren has been admitted into the hospital so I'm preparing to meet her. It's a grandchild who hasn't been back a long while. It lacks warmth to speak with her only through the flake."

"She's a fortunate grandchild."

"Did you come to visit too, Minse?"

"I'm here to visit Claribel. You should already know?"

"Sometimes I too want to pretend I don't know anything."

"Though I don't know which grandchild of yours is injured, but is it someone that I know?"

No one knew Delbone's real age but most of her numerous grandchild were Psychokinesists. Even her great-grandchildren worked as Psychokinesists. Most of the mainstream Psychokinesists in Grendan were her direct descendants. Delbone, who held all information of Grendan, was not just simply a Heaven's Blade successor.

"No. I don't think Minse knows her. She left Grendan when she was very small. She only returned recently."

"There is such a person? But speaking of which, can she be in Zuellni?"

"Yes. She met the commotion while passing through Zuellni but she was injured before that, and it wasn't life-threatening."

"Really? Then that's good."

"Yes. Either way, she's the grandchild I care for the most. I'm really happy."

Minse could only think of her as a kind and approachable old lady as he looked at her expression.

"I hope your grandchild can be safely discharged."

"Thank you. Ah, and also, Her Majesty hasn't noticed this commotion yet. His infiltration and Claribel's personality are all within predictions. Please rest at ease."

".....Seems I can sleep better. Thank you."

"There's no need. I've got to go now."

"Yes, goodbye."

He watched Delbone wheel the wheelchair past him then he headed for the exit of the hospital.

He smacked his lips as he felt the sweat left on his head. He already knew. This shouldn't be surprising. Delbone's Psychokinesis had always been covering this city. It was impossible for her not to know of anything that happened in this city. What was terrifying was the existence of a Psychokinesist like Delbone. Nothing would happen to this city so long as she lived. She knew before anyone else the nearing of filth monsters. Perhaps her sensing speed of filth monsters was even faster than Electronic Fairies. Minse was grateful for that. Also, Grendan's political climate had always been stable. The even better thing was that in Grendan existed the Heaven's Blade successors led by the Queen. As such, no one had truly experienced the Queen's terror.

She possessed an overwhelming power. And she also had the best information gatherer with her, Delbone. It was reality that these two were cooperating. One wrong step might turn into a terrifying dictatorship that no one could resist. It was good now because the Queen and Delbone had the same aim. The city's economy was stable. There wasn't much commotion in the lives of

normal citizens. But if one out of these three points was to break down, then symptoms of the other two points collapsing might appear.

Minse had this premonition.

Minse's family had fallen because of his connection with Layfon . He wasn't all that good as a Military Artist and that had changed his past naivety. He could see the cruel reality much more clearly. That might explain why he was more tired. He could only be chased by all sorts of realities as he didn't have the clear goal of being a Military Artist.

So he thought this city was dangerous.

The Queen. Delbone. The normal citizens living their stable lives.

These three points. One of them would collapse. He thought of it a bit and felt that reality wasn't that far off.

"Uh, I'm thinking of useless things again."

He pressed down the hair blown messy by the wind as he complained, then he jumped for his own home.

Delbone rounded the corner and entered a patient's room after parting with Minse. The scenery inside the room was no different from others. The walls and floor were white. One bed was in the room along with an essential cabinet and a refrigerator storing

food and drinks..... What was left was the machine observing the patient's condition.

The patient on the bed was connected to a drip. But bandages wrapped up this patient's entire body.

(Grandmother.....)

The patient was holding a heavy Diamond Dite. Three flakes hovered above the bed. It was difficult to discern the gender of the electric voice that echoed in the room.

"It's been a long while, Elsmau."

Delbone smiled, watching the person on the bed. But she couldn't tell his expression as he was wrapped in bandages. Only in this room had Delbone decided not to use Psychokinesis.

(How have you been?)

"I'm very happy we can meet even now."

(I thought it wouldn't be possible.)

"Because you think I'd die first?"

(I've never wanted grandmother to die..... I just thought I'd die in battle before we meet.)

"Ryuhou Gadge must be a Military Artist more incredible than I imagined. I can feel you've been in many battles through your Psychokinesis. You've accumulated much experience."

(Thank you.)

Silence suddenly came but it didn't bring any dissatisfaction to Delbone. She was only giving her grandchild enough time to remember his past.

The medical bandages were blue and they were wrapped around Elsmau's entire body, even his eyes. This was the grandchild Delbone was watching. He said this price had allowed him to resist pollutants. Though, his appearance was the exchange.

(Grandmother.....)

"I'm happy you've agreed to the operation. Though I'm interested in your special ability, a girl should still take care of her own appearance. Else you'd lose what you've obtained with so much effort."

(I'm not thinking of that anymore.....)

"Elsmau."

(I've already given up that name.)

"Then pick it back up. Elsmau. You, who haven't given up the family name of Fermaus has the right to pick it up."

(But he.....)

"Then take it that he also wishes for it."

Silence came again but Delbone didn't let it stay for long this time.

"What to do with the Mercenary Gang has already been decided . The suitable reward has also been prepared. They will accept the reward. It's up to them individually for staying in Grendan as a Military Artist or become a traveler once more."

(I see.....)

"But you will not return to the Mercenary Gang?"

Silence.

"Ryuhou Gadge's adopted son is the one to inherit his will. But he's not here."

(.....)

"I've already heard of him. What an unexpected meeting. But no inheritor appeared after losing the leader. The organization has already died at that time."

(That's true. I understand.)

"But even though the organization is dead, even though the Psychokinesist named Fermaus is also dead, you've something you can do, something that Elsmau can do."

(What do you anticipate of me?)

Delbone paused and breathed in deeply. A very deep breath. It felt like she had waited a long time to say this. She had scolded Tigris for that. It was like a child who should have already died but did not. Not because she was a woman, but because of her experience as a mother and a grandmother. She herself had not hardened her heart and made a calm decision at that time; that was why she had persisted with the naivety of leaving it to fate.

Everything was for the sake of waiting for the right timing so she could say what she was about to say.

"I want you to inherit my everything."

Soundless impact hammered her granddaughter's entire body. Delbone quietly watched her reaction.

(Why let me.....)

"Though I don't know your personality, I'm also a person. I can stretch the limit of my flesh but it's not possible to do so for my brain and Kei vein."

(But.....)

Elsmau wanted to move but she couldn't. The drip contained different nutrients and also numbing medicine. The content was necessary for the upcoming operation.

So she couldn't move on the bed.

Even though she would not die by directly contacting the pollutants and she could sense the coming of filth monsters through her sense of smell, the Psychokinesist of the Salivan Guidance Mercenary Gang, Fermaus, was a female. As a female, she had chosen this kind of road. This was all done to meet the man named Ryuhou Gadge. She left Grendan when she was still a girl, entering her days of battle. It was the same to stay in Grendan if all she sought were battles. But it was different with the Mercenary Gang. They had the quality that differed from Military Artists who fought in the city.

The end result was the birth of the Psychokinesist named Fermaus.

(Why is it me? If you're to choose from the family, besides me.....)

"Not that I have to choose from my family. But I can't find anyone suitable. Besides, the other people know me too well. You who have always been outside are different."

(Even so, my power of Psychokinesis is not of grandmother's level..... If that's the case, I think that girl is more suitable.)

"Girl?"

(The girl I met in Zuellni.)

"That girl. Ah, true, that girl has excellent talent. Even now she's trying to interfere with my flake. She's very cute. I'm letting her deceive herself now."

Delbone couldn't help but smile, thinking of the first time she met that girl. The troubled expression she held because of her immense power. Delbone had also gone through such a stage. Why could something so simple change her fate? This doubt only vanished till her father's death, when she decided to follow in her father's footsteps. She couldn't remember why she changed her mind. It was something very important but she failed to remember it. Delbone had consciously sealed off some of her memories or sealed them off. She had also buried her memories of how she came to live in Grendan.

For having lived over hundreds of years, she had numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She found it more interesting to look at her future rather than relying on her memories to support her. This was the truth. What happened in the past was no longer important for her.

But the little memory she recalled had strangely overlapped with that girl. It was a reality that Delbone held goodwill towards that girl.

"It would have been good if she could stay beside me and I could nurture her for a year."

(Then.....)

"But I don't think that's what she wishes. Besides, the time I have left is less than one year."

(No way.....)

"A human life is unexpectedly fragile."

Looking at Elsmau who held a not-knowing-what-to-do expression, Delbone decided to leave it at that. Besides, Elsmau had just returned to Grendan and she also needed to undergo the operation. Her feeling must be unstable. It wouldn't be good to be too impatient.

"But it's true that I don't have much time left so I hope you don't take too long considering it. Please don't see me go before the result is out."

(.....I understand.)

Delbone had conveyed her intention. That was enough.

She blessed her granddaughter and left the room.

It was coming.

Layfon stood on the spot, spaced out. The girl appearing from behind the door and carrying a shopping basket, Lucia, had walked straight to him. Layfon didn't move as he was shocked but Lucia only stayed surprised for a very short moment. She had then walked straight to him.

Ah, she's coming. That was what Layfon thought.

If he was to evade, no, if it was Layfon, he could avoid it subconsciously. But the fist in front of her long and delicate hand had landed on his head.

"Uu....."

Lucia was a normal female. Even so, it still hurt enough for him to voice it.

"You, geez, just what did you do?"

Layfon touched the place he got hit and couldn't say anything.

"I decided to buy something, thinking the commotion has stopped. Who knew you'd be here. Did you cause that commotion ?"

"Even if it's me, I didn't do it because I like it....."

"As I thought, it's you."

Layfon got hit once more and he just sat down on the ground.

"Listen to me, Lucia-neesan."

Tears leaked from the corner of his eyes. Was this a habit? Or was it formed subconsciously due to a childhood habit? Layfon looked at Lucia with an expression as if he was wronged.

But his sister was heartless.

"I don't have the time. I'm very busy now. Anyway, just go inside. There won't be enough things at home if I don't go shopping. No. Wait a minute. You guys smell. Go and take a shower first."

Shopping took the priority over her little brother. Lucia pointed at the house she emerged from and left them.

"What an incredible sister....."

This was Sharnid's conclusion. Everyone in here probably held the same conclusion.

And that wasn't the only surprising event for the three.

After entering Lucia's house honestly, they heard loud crying.

"It's a baby's crying voice."

"A baby's here."

"Seems so."

Felli and Sharnid confirmed the situation from the word exchange with each other. On the other hand, Layfon seemed surprised about hearing a baby's cry. Of course, this wasn't the only surprising thing. Suddenly, someone headed for them from the direction of the cry. The closer the person was, the louder the crying.

And.....

"Ah, Lucia. Did you forget something? It's good that you're here . This child just keeps crying. I wonder whether he might be feeling uncomfortable....."

The person holding the child suddenly stopped all movement.

She looked at Layfon and the other two.

And Layfon, Felli and Sharnid all looked at the girl.

Then all four spoke out.

"Why are you here!?"

The child in Nina's arms was still crying.

The child was passed around and it stopped crying the moment it was in Layfon's arms.

The three of them took turns taking a shower. The clothes that Layfon and Sharnid wore underneath their fighting clothes

seemed to smell clean, so they kept wearing it. Felli had taken Lucia's clothes without permission and now wore it.

"Why.....?"

Nina glared at Layfon with dissatisfaction.

"That child must have felt your tension."

Layfon knew of the real reason, even though Nina put it that way. Even a baby had people that he liked and disliked. This was normal for Layfon who had experience looking after his siblings at the orphanage. Even so, the way Nina held the baby was very dangerous.

Layfon and the others were in the living room. The baby's cradle was also here. All the tools were available. Lucia must be looking after the child here.

"No. Let's just put aside that problem for now....." Sharnid said with an exhausted expression though he understood her bitterness.

They came here to rescue Nina but they never thought they'd see her so easily, and she was looking after a baby. Looking at the reality of her being kidnapped, Sharnid could never imagine her looking after a child as one of the possibilities. He would really want to meet with the person who let her do this. Just how did Nina come to be in these circumstances? He didn't get it.

Layfon wasn't the only one perplexed. Sharnid was the same so he couldn't blame him.

"Layfon, let me hold the child too."

"Don't ignore me!"

"It's noisy here."

Not only was Felli ignored but he was scolded by Nina. Sharnid wanted to cry but no tears fell. Layfon didn't know what to do. Anyway, best first give the child to Felli.

"So light....."

"He's still just a child. About three months old."

"Don't cry."

The baby let Felli hold him with his head on Felli's face. His hand moved on her shoulder, caressing her silvery hair.

"His neck has enough muscles. It's easy to hold him."

"Then why was he crying when I held him?" Nina glared at Layfon.

"Because you were trembling, right?"

"What did you say?"

"You were tense? He didn't want to be held by someone tense."

"Uh....."

"For someone who came to Grendan and had to look after a baby, it's inevitable that she'd be tense."

Felli held nothing back in her words that were sharp like a blade. Even Layfon could feel the thorns in her words. Suddenly speechless, Nina didn't know what to do.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"How should I put it....."

"We want to know the reason behind it. Why is someone who had been kidnapped looking after a baby in an unfamiliar house. And it's someone who can't even cook."

"Cooking. Out of all the areas, I don't want you to criticize me on my cooking!"

Felli and Nina talked to each other as she held the baby. Layfon and Sharnid exchanged a glance.

"What should we do?"

"Anyway, it's useless till the two of them have calmed them."

"Then....."

"Escape. Escape. There's no other choice but to run away from a woman's fight."

"Ah....."

Layfon found his observation very correct. He was concerned about the baby but he'd get their attention if he took the baby from Felli. Besides, the baby didn't seem dissatisfied to be held by her.

"Then let's escape!"

"Yes."

The two of them sneaked their conversation behind the other two and slowly prepared to leave the living room.

The sound of a door being opened came to them. Footsteps headed straight for the living room.

"I've come back. Ah, it's good that I made it back in time. Really, I missed the sale for diapers because of a certain idiot."

Lucia was back. One hand held a bag of diapers, the other held a shopping basket full of food.

"......What are you doing?"

"Uh....."

"Preparing to escape a war between women."

"Don't do something that foolish. Layfon, come and help with the cooking."

"Ah, yes."

"You two. If you got time then come and help."

"Uu....."

"....."

"Huh? What is it?"

"They don't know how to cook," Sharnid said as Lucia was perplexed with their attitude.

"Sharnid....."

"I don't want to be told of that by you."

"Huh? Me? I can make small dishes."

"What!?"

"Impossible....."

Sharnid responded to the question with a matter of fact expression. His attitude shook the certitude in Nina and Felli.

"But in the camp before....."

"I didn't think I needed to help having looked at Layfon and Meishen's cooking."

"Uu....."

"What the. The ones who can't cook are the girls? I can't look at this anymore," Lucia criticized the embarrassed girls without softening.

"Never mind. Layfon and I will take care of the cooking. You guys just help me look after little Maru. Ah, that's right. First change his diaper."

Not only the girls, but Sharnid also wasn't familiar with this term diaper. But Lucia smiled at their anxiety.

"It's something you have to do anyway. Why not learn it now?"

Lucia's kitchen gave Layfon a familiar feeling even though the place had changed. This was a feeling he had once he stood here. He knew what she wanted to make just by looking at the ingredients in her shopping basket. He took out the vegetables from the basket and made the appropriate preparations for cooking. Lucia didn't say anything after looking at him. His must have made the right guess.

The baby..... Layfon heard from Lucia that the baby's name was Marukuto..... From behind came the confused voices of Sharnid, Felli and Nina and the baby's dissatisfied crying.

"You look to be in good spirits....." Lucia said as she chopped the vegetables. "It seems you also have your own friends. This is better than anything because your social abilities are just too horrible."

"Are you still mad, Nee-san?"

Layfon looked at her as he peeled off the skin of the vegetables. Her arms and legs were delicate. Her face was proper. She would be a beauty if she was to put some make-up on. But she didn't seem interested. She exuded a manly feel rather than a woman's. Her personality was quite casual and even her clothes leaned towards a male's. Lucia was raised in the same orphanage as him. She had left for work when Layfon was still in Grendan.

Lucia was the one who used to cook for Layfon and the others and change their diapers. Layfon grew up looking at her back and he had learned how to cook from her. Though the place had changed now, the person who used it hadn't. The knives and bowls were placed in the same positions. Same for the herbs. It was the same as the past. Layfon once again remembered the nostalgic past in here.

"Rather than being mad, I had given up. You aren't good at socializing. And now you suddenly went on a rampage after a conversation. What can I do except give up on you?"

"Uu....."

"Besides, for those brats who were affected by you, it's inevitable that they hate you after being betrayed."

"Seems so....."

"But you shouldn't keep worrying about it. The magazine wrote an unexpectedly detailed report on the underground matches. The public's condemnation on you has quickly disappeared because of it. The condemnation is pushed onto society. I think there was some manipulation of information. Anyway, those brats know of this, and thanks to it, our foster father could reopen the dojo. Do you know about him opening the dojo?"

"Yeah, I already heard of it."

"From Leerin?"

"Yeah....."

"Geez, I don't know whether to say that child is spirited or stubborn..... Anyway, have you two met?"

"You haven't heard?"

"What?"

Layfon looked behind him. The three of them still hadn't managed to change the diaper. Lucia said angrily. "That child will catch a cold!" and made the three more confused and tense.

"So what's happened? I haven't heard anything from Rui."

"She was in Zuellni till now....."

For her to use the name Rui so casually. As he thought, that girl was..... and if that's the case, Nee-san had..... Layfon continued his explanation as he pondered.

About Leerin coming to Zuellni and Derek leaving him the Psyharden Katana. About the commotion a few days back and about the Queen bringing Leerin back to Grendan.

"She was brought back by Her Majesty? Why would she do that ?"

"I don't know either. Her Majesty didn't tell me anything and Leerin also told me not to get involved....."

And he had denied her request but he couldn't do anything. All he saw was the distance of strength between him and Lintence.

"So that's why you came? Really. The most famous and the most flustered person in the orphanage is you. Are you still rolling down the slope of life?"

He couldn't retort to her words as he felt the same.

Looking at him, she sighed helplessly.

"You're here now but you still have such an expression. Ah, I think I might understand why Leerin said what she said."

"Eh?" He was surprised.

"And.....?"

If she knew and understood, he also wanted to know and understand.

He still couldn't believe himself of that time. Why did Leerin refuse his help? He knew she wasn't someone who would casually ask for help as it would bring trouble to others. He was very clear about her personality. But the Leerin of that time was different. He felt she was wholeheartedly denying him.

Why was she denying him? Did Nee-san understand?

Then.....

Lucia looked behind her and saw the three had safely changed the baby's diaper. She sighed in relief.

"You..... Did you plan to rescue the girl called Nina too?"

"Eh? Ah, yes....."

"Then you've already reached your goal. Return to Zuellni."

"Eh?"

"Perhaps you don't have to see Leerin anymore."

Something seemed to be blowing about madly in his heart as he heard those words though he himself wasn't sure what it was.

Gorneo was feeling the wind.

After that event..... Gorneo had been chasing after Shante after the fight with the numerous giants in front of the secret research laboratory of Zuellni. He had kept chasing her and finally arrived at Grendan. He missed the opportunity to enter Grendan due to ill luck. While feeling frustrated and wondering how to get in, he saw several Military Artists of the Luckens School in the crowd and had successfully entered Grendan thanks to them.

Shante might have escaped successfully but the only place to escape was Zuellni.

As long as this was inside Grendan, there must exist the Luckens people. Though one person did not have to belong to one single school, many Military Artists came to this city to study the Luckens hand to hand combat skills in addition to their skills in weaponry.

Besides, Gorneo didn't think Shante had returned to Zuellni. In that case, it was more efficient to search for her in Grendan.

"....."

As such, he had returned to a home that he had left for five years and now he was standing here. The tomb in Grendan.

The family tomb where each family member was buried. Before the tomb stood the wooden plaque carved with names. The most recent dead were carved on the wood and the plaque was to be buried many years after. It was impossible to make a tomb just for one person on limited soil. Tombs of families that did not produce any progeny were immediately disposed of.

The wooden plaque before Gorneo had the name Gahard Baren carved on it. Gorneo had heard of Gahard Baren's death from Savaris. And he had heard of the truth behind Gahard and Layfon after returning to Grendan.

He finally knew of the truth.

He could not hate Layfon anymore after knowing the truth.

"You chased after my brother too much....."

Savaris, a representative of one chasing after desire and fight was the condensed product of the spirit of Grendan's Military Artists. Gahard Baren wanted to be like him. Originally, for a large school like Luckens, problematic children like Savaris shouldn't have been allowed to be born. Even Gorneo, as his brother, thought so. Other disciples in the school were influenced by Savaris, thinking they may become like him as long as they kept honing their skills. Gahard was second to Savaris.

Perhaps Gorneo, who escaped from Grendan to Zuellni, did not hold a common feeling with other Military Artists. He probably became like this because he found his brother scary and that he would never match his brother. And perhaps his thinking to chase

after powerful strength had been taken by his older brother. Perhaps Savaris had taken away this gene passed from their father.

And because of that, he had never thought of surpassing Savaris. Or he could say that this imagination held no meaning. Perhaps the thought of never surpassing Savaris had entered his subconscious as he had always been around Savaris, feeling the strong pressure from him. This was probably an easily explainable problem from a doctor or scientist's viewpoint.

But Gorneo didn't care for the reason anymore. The attraction to Savaris that stimulated a desire for strength had caused Gahard to take the wrong path. Or one could say he had used the wrong method to reach his goal. Gorneo felt the wind while standing before the tomb of the brother he respected.

This wasn't the wind blowing past him.

This was the wind howling in his heart.

He had been clashing with something inside his heart in the ruined city. This feeling had been clinging to him till he realized his fury had calmed. To put it simply, his fury had gradually died. The hatred he held for Layfon disappeared bit by bit and what was left was confusion and a little bit of anger.

(This isn't the time for this.)

He stood a while before the tomb and left. This wasn't the time to look into the emptiness inside his heart.

He had to find Shante. That was why he returned to Grendan.

"Really. Just how much more do I have to do."

He complained as he thought of the reason behind the missing Shante.

Why did she suddenly head for Grendan?

She was originally a perplexing girl. She was raised by wild beasts in the Forest City Erupa for some reason so sometimes her actions were like that of a beast. Her actions weren't suitable to a human society.

Remembering this, Gorneo recalled how he got into trouble for tidying up the commotions she caused. But her action this time. How should he put it? It felt different from usual. Her actions till now were difficult to fathom from a human's viewpoint but it made more sense looking from a beast's viewpoint such as shouting at the moon because one couldn't sleep at night or chasing after the mutated mice that had escaped the Farming course. This was the same for incredible events that involved the City Police as this was the habits of the wild beasts that raised Shante in Erupa.

In that case, something unbelievable must have happened during that time.

Gorneo's physique wasn't huge compared to normal people despite his being blocky and large. But Shante usually sat on his shoulders. That was how delicate and small she was. But at that

time, Shante's small body had undergone unbelievable growth after touching the Heartseer fruit that was native to Erupa. Though that body might match that of her age, it might even have surpassed a body of her original age. What had Layfon said back then?

He seemed to have said she was being restricted. Her Kei vein was restricted and that restriction was released after she touched Heartseer. Shante regaining her original body size proved Layfon's speculation might be correct. Just what created that problem though? No. Layfon's speculation was not enough to explain the scene back then.

Layfon and Gorneo who had lived in Grendan could accept the explanation of the flesh being restricted. Internal Kei could control the growth of the body to some degree and kept the body in its best condition. And what if a greater power was used? Such as a Heaven's Blade or the Queen's strength that surpassed a Heaven's Blade? He heard the Queen retained her girl form though she had lived many years. But he had never heard of the Queen suddenly turning from a woman into a girl. It was possible to suppress growth but it shouldn't possible in Shante's case that involved speedy growth and shrinking. Bones, muscles and internal organs shouldn't be able to change so suddenly. Kei wasn't magic. It couldn't not leave any traces and it couldn't make anything appear from nothing.

The changes on Shante at that time was like magic — a phenomenon that wasn't possible. Was this related to those strange

guys that appeared beside Shante? Those guys hadn't appeared since then but would they appear now? Did Shante come to Grendan because of them?

"Damn."

Not that he only thought of this now. He had thought of it many times since arriving in Grendan. It was difficult to fathom her actions. Though she would attack without orders, she had never left Gorneo in a battle without saying a word. Her action at that time was different.

The current abnormal event and the past abnormal situations overlapped and gave an answer. This answer might not be right but it wouldn't be strange to arrive at it.

"Just where did she run off to?"

Not simply talking to himself, one could clearly feel the anxiety and impatience in his words.

The sun had traded position with the night sky. There seemed to be a commotion somewhere but it had died down. Gorneo's numerous journeys of running under Grendan's night sky began in order to find Shante.

Everyone quieted down after dinner.

"I think you guys have a lot to say so I'll return to the workroom ."

Lucia carried the child and entered the workroom.

"Speaking of which, what does that nee-san do?" Sharnid said.

"She's a Dite Technician," Layfon answered. Perhaps she was influenced by their foster father, Lucia was very interested in Dites . She became an apprentice early in age. She also looked after Layfon and the siblings in the orphanage everyday as she was female. But now she had her own workroom.

"That's incredible."

She had used practice as excuse to adjust Layfon's Dite before he became a Heaven's Blade successor.

"Then let's end the conversation of that topic here," Sharnid tossed his gaze at Nina.

Layfon and Felli also looked at her.

"Though it's not bad to find you so easily, we still want to know what happened if possible."

"....."

Nina lowered her head, thinking something.

"And if possible please don't say it's a secret? I don't dislike you but I can't give my life for secrets. Either way, you're our Captain."

Nina had gone missing after the match with the 1st platoon and she had then suddenly appeared. Sharnid was obviously talking about that event. At that time, Nina hadn't mentioned anything about her whereabouts.

"I'm sorry....."

She still didn't say anything more.

"Captain, I'm tired of these things happening all of a sudden. Isn't it about time you tell us the truth and let us judge it?"

"That truth..... I think I might know of it....."

"What did you say.....?"

"I didn't mean to hide it. I didn't even understand all those things that happened after the match with the 1st platoon. I just thought you guys would get caught in something troublesome if I told you so I didn't say anything."

"Get caught in something troublesome?"

"Even I myself am not clear on why I said that. I didn't say the reason back then but now I understand it so I can tell you everything."

"Heh~ Isn't that great?"

"But I don't have the evidence to prove it..... If I got it wrong you guys might get caught in it, get involved in this eternal war, even so....."

"Don't be so cold. We....."

"This is very important."

Her intense attitude made Sharnid swallow his words.

"This war might be related to Zuellni, no, it must be related to something bigger after this. I can't win against a Heaven's Blade successor even after obtaining the Haikizoku's power. But the senpai in this war has got me involved in it. I don't think I can win against that person. In fact, I lost to him."

"Just what're you saying?"

"This is a battlefield associated with someone that strong. If you guys got caught in it, even you might die. Please give it careful thought and consider whether you are up to it. If not, please return to Zuellni. The deadline is tomorrow morning."

"Hey, wait up. Are you saying you're not returning to Zuellni?"

Sharnid felt it from Nina's words. Layfon thought so too.

"No, I'll return. But that's after I've witnessed what'll happen in Grendan."

"Hey, hey, do you understand what you just said?"

Sharnid's expression was helpless. Felli too, the tiny changes of her eyebrows after hearing her words showed her disapproval. Nina's thought was different to Sharnid and the team's. This was now clear.

"And what is that for?"

"The things that are to happen in Grendan will be like the ending of the series of strange events in Zuellni. From the Haikizoku to Zuellni going on a rampage to the recent fights and all that will happen. The end of all that will happen in Grendan. I can't not witness it."

"Is this intelligence real?"

"Whether it's true or not can only be told after it's happened. So it's also possible that only I've been deceived."

"What if Zuellni takes action while you're waiting?" Felli raised a new question.

Zuellni's machines were repairing the city while they were here. Layfon and they didn't know whether the city would move before they left it. This involved Zuellni's self-repair ability. It might move ahead of schedule.

"Would you return on a roaming bus? I shouldn't be saying this but the Military Arts Competition hasn't entirely ended. Everyone has also taken a beating in the previous fight. No one can tell under this circumstance that the 17th platoon has left the formation. Or is this what you're expecting?"

Felli added a few more questions in her explanation that she said in a faint voice.

"To hear of the Military Arts Competition from you....."

"I'm not interested. But I deliberately reminded you as you didn't seem to have thought of it."

Nina could only smile bitterly. The wrinkles between Felli's eyebrows showed her disapproval.

"Disregarding everything except for what lies before my eyes..... Perhaps I'm really like that," she said. She wasn't angry. She just smiled bitterly. "But I think I'll regret it if I don't witness everything here."

"Just regret? That's only your personal feeling. My brother would have laughed it off if he heard of this."

"Really. We came because we lack someone of a rational mind. But the result is unexpected."

"I'm not happy."

Sharnid shrugged. Felli continued to stare at Nina with wrinkles in between her eyebrows.

"Leave the troublesome things to Grendan..... Didn't their Psychokinesist say so when she contacted the Student President? Hence we do not have the need to confirm things here. Besides, it appears the other side wants Captain to..... To put it accurately,

the Haikizoku. You shouldn't have stayed after knowing of this fact. Don't you think the only option is to escape?"

"Uh? Ah, yes."

Layfon could only reply in a fluster at the sudden question.

"What. Your heart isn't here."

"I'm sorry..... but I think it's better for the Captain to go back."

"Why?"

"The Captain's original goal was to help Zuellni. Please don't forget."

Nina lost some of her confidence after listening to him.

"Even so....."

"Exactly. That's why you shouldn't forget your original goal. Things to do with Zuellni should be taken care of first compared to other cities'."

"Uh, as Layfon and Felli-chan said. You're not a ball whose direction will change after the ball hits the wall. No one would know where you end up in."

"But....."

Nina didn't give up her resistance even though her confidence was becoming weaker and weaker. She still persisted in her

decision even though the protests were heaped one after another on her. Seriousness suffused the air. The situation would worsen at any moment and that was keeping everyone quiet as time passed silently. Who would know how the situation would have turned out if Lucia hadn't come over to check on them.

Layfon hadn't said a word in this period.

"You don't need to see Leerin anymore."

Layfon remembered what Lucia had said in the kitchen. He slept in the living room with the blanket that Lucia had brought for him on his shoulder. Sharnid was sleeping in the living room too. Nina and Felli were asleep in Lucia's room. Lucia was still working in the workshop.

Lucia-nee said there wasn't a need to see Leerin. Why?

"I said so already. You still have such an expression here. Do you want to learn what she's really thinking? But you still hold such a weak expression. But then this is a sign of your personality. But do you think that stubborn girl would change her thinking if you were to show her this expression?"

Lucia hadn't stopped working as she spoke. She had already finished cutting up the pealed vegetables. The meat was cooking in a flat pan and she was reaching her hand up to the cabinet above her head for the seasoning.

"Nothing would change because that child has decided. Then she'd keep on walking on the road she has decided as she's mentally prepared for it. It's the same as that time when she left the orphanage in order to defend you."

Feeling her reproachful gaze, Layfon lowered his head.

"Not that I'd scold you for what you did back then..... since you did it for the sake of the orphanage. It's just that your method was wrong. Still, you've considered and that part of you was worth the sympathy. Besides, I can tell from your attitude back then that you were also mentally prepared to be scolded by your father. Same as the time when you chose the sword."

"Um....."

"Don't answer me with such a vague attitude," she said and clouted him with the seasoning bottle.

"Your face is the same as back then but your heart is no longer the same. Still, you're stubborn..... perhaps that's right."

She watched him. He lowered his head more under that gaze. Still, their hands did not stop as they cooked. Noise came from the flat pan and Layfon put the cut up vegetables into it, turning up the fire.

"Once something's decided, you wouldn't talk over it with other people and you'd carry it through. You're like that and Leerin's like that too. Perhaps me too. Other brothers and sisters are probably the same. A group of stubborn children influenced by

our foster father. We wouldn't change once we've made our decision. All we can do is hammer at each other and use a rope to stop the other, or to comfort the one who has experienced failure. We only have two choices. There's no middle road."

"Aye."

He replied instinctively and then..... he was hit by the fork she used to turn the meat around.

"Since you understand this too then what are you going to do? You still haven't decided right? So I say, hurry and go back."

"But....."

"There's no but. I don't want to say this, but you're no longer a citizen of Grendan. Father has forgiven you and I'm not angry with you. This isn't the time to talk about family relationships. We can only pray for your safety as you fight in Zuellni with your life on the line. At the same time, this is Leerin's wish to return to Grendan. It's just that her plan was carried out earlier than expected. I don't know what happened in between. Perhaps something big has changed in her life. I don't know what she's planning to do either but she must have had prepared her resolve for something. We can listen to her troubles as we're in Grendan but you can't. All you can do is pray for her safety, just like what we can do for you."

"....."

He couldn't say anything. The cooking process was smooth. The meat was done. They just needed to work on it a bit more. The soup had been poured into the bowl of vegetables. The food had been seasoned. The aroma that made the stomach acid react wafted out.

But Layfon had no appetite.

"Speaking of which, what are you planning to do once you've confirmed Leerin's thoughts?"

As Lucia had said.

(Just what do I want?)

Layfon's mind turned and turned as he lay like that without any inclination to sleep. The lamp in the living room emitted dim orange light. He stared at it, spacing out.

(After meeting Leerin.....)

Just what does he want to do? Not that he hasn't thought of it, just that he felt he had to save her when he saw the Queen carrying her. But why did the Queen come to take her away? He didn't know. Only his feeling told him he had to see her once more.

(Could it be.....)

What if Leerin came back to Grendan because she was facing something difficult? Would she tell him? Would he have said it if

he were her? Absolutely not. He knew because of his experience of entering the underground match.

(Even so.....)

Even so, he still wanted to see her one more time. He didn't know why. No. Perhaps he knew all too well.

Because of what happened that night.

He caressed the Dite that Kirik gave him and recalled that night when Leerin collapsed due to over-exhaustion. It must be because of that night.

The impulse that rushed up in the form of that kiss.

Because he wanted to confirm the true meaning behind that kiss .

That must be it.

"Yo, still awake?"

He was shocked that someone suddenly talked to him.

"Sharnid-senpai, you're still awake?"

"Yeah, though I'm a bit tired. Uh, I'm also of a personality that wants to be able to sleep quickly in this situation."

He also had his sensitive side even though he acted flippantly. Layfon could tell from his involvement in the match against the

10th platoon but he thought Sharnid was already asleep. No, he had wanted Sharnid to be asleep.

"I spoke cause I thought you were still awake."

"Ah....."

"You'll still stay even if we are to return to Zuellni tomorrow, right?"

"....."

"We all know. We just don't say it. That's why only I can be the bad messenger."

Layfon chose to remain silent at his self-mocking words. To put it correctly, he didn't answer him. Sharnid shrugged at his reaction .

"But we knew that in the beginning. You must have come for Leerin. I knew it would turn out like this."

Sharnid's figure moved in the orange light. Originally he was lying face down. Now he turned around to face the ceiling. He wasn't looking at Layfon. Did he have to use internal Kei just to look at the ceiling?

"You wouldn't tell anyone? I don't know what Nina thinks but me and Felli hold the same opinion. We just haven't confirmed it with each other yet."

"What opinion?"

"We are against your saving that child."

"....."

"Aren't you going to ask me why?"

"....."

"I heard it though Felli-chan collapsed at that time. You could say it's normal for Leerin to act that way so to protect you in that situation, but I still think it's different. I'm not that familiar with her but Leerin's smart. If she were to protect you, she'd have said something even more serious."

Perhaps that really was the case.

Layfon couldn't think of anything except "perhaps that really was the case". Why didn't Leerin say "save me" at that time? Was it because of the Queen and Lintence? Besides, Leerin wasn't one to say something like "save me".

But he had wanted her to say "save me".

Except she told him to "return".

"You're still going right?"

"What is it? Because....."

"Don't you feel uncomfortable?"

"Uh? What?"

"This vague attitude."

"....."

"Either point is persuasive. I can feel that she's protecting you. I also feel what she said was genuine. If it's me, I'd bet on her being genuine. But her attitude back then wasn't clear enough so there isn't much I can do. I couldn't have reached the side of that elegant monster like nee-chan so I couldn't ask you to do it instead."

Sharnid must be talking about Barmelin? True. His fighting strength couldn't match hers. With the amount of experience and training she had, she didn't even need to ambush him to defeat Sharnid.

"But..... Leerin herself said she wanted to come back. That's why it's meaningless even if I were to meet her."

Layfon deliberately said an opposite opinion. No, he just repeated the opinion he heard from Lucia. He only said this in order to confirm whether it was the truth. But that feeling of pressure in his heart became heavier after he said those words.

"Perhaps that might be the case, but you're still going?" Sharnid said clearly.

".....Uh?"

"Hasn't this become your instinctive reaction?"

"Uh Uh?"

"Anyway, you can't ignore what has happened before you. This point is similar to Nina. If it was Nina, we don't feel easy leaving her on her own so we'd stay by her side. But you're different. We can't catch up to you so we can only let you go alone. But you may think it's better if we weren't here?"

"Not at all."

Layfon felt so from the bottom of his heart. He was injured in an accident before fighting the platoon match with the 1st platoon. He then deliberately let Sharnid and the others view the collaborative fight of the Salinvan Mercenary Gang, hoping they could one day fight with him. He also voiced his intention at that time. That wasn't a lie.

"If possible, I want you all to come with me."

Sharnid's figure moved in the dark without any noise. Layfon didn't think he had accepted his word.

"Do you mean it? Not so. I don't think you're lying and I'm not doubting you. It's just that you never counted us in as part of your fighting strength. You also never used your full force in the platoon matches. I feel that you did forcefully fight with us in the Military Arts Competition but you also did hold back, didn't you?"

"That....."

"Well, I'm not scolding you. Don't misunderstand. The problem is the gap between us is just too huge. So it can't be helped that this problem appears. You wouldn't leave your back to people who can't catch up with you in a crisis. You'd ask Felli to support you with Psychokinesis. And isn't it because Felli is the only one who fulfills yours requirement?

"So..... So you did that?"

"Uh?"

"In that fight in the afternoon. I didn't quite know what you did back there but I think I understand a little bit. That was dangerous. You were forcing yourself. How is that different from taking illegal drugs?"

"You understood already? Incredible."

Sharnid seemed to be mocking himself as the air stirred lightly. Layfon could feel a sense of mock-laughter and a sense of loneliness.

"Because I've denied his method, so I can only use this way."

Sharnid meant the platoon match with the 10th platoon, with Dinn Dee. Dinn, as a former comrade of Sharnid's, had taken illegal drug to increase his Kei output. He had exchanged his body to increase his Kei. One city after another had banned the use of such drug because it was very dangerous. Still, Dinn wanted to protect this Academy City event though he had to use such a

method to increase his Kei. But his goal was prevented by Sharnid's 17th platoon.

"Just exactly.....?"

"My father taught me that for emergencies. Originally he said to use it to escape but I could only use it then. It isn't a move that can gain much time for long term escape."

Layfon weaved a net in the afternoon fight to buy Sharnid some time, but what Sharnid did back then was not possible judging by his amount of kei. But he managed to successfully stall the 30 or so Grendan Military Artists. Layfon found that his move very dangerous. He was concentrating on weaving the song so he couldn't fully understand the secret of Sharnid's move. But he still made a decision judging by the tiny feeling he got.

Increasing the speed and output of Kei. This sounded good, but Kei pathways, Kei vein and the Military Artist's flesh could not sustain this sudden increase of Kei for a long period as they were used to the usual amount of Kei. Forcing a Kei vein to increase its flow was like using a pump to make a heart beat faster.

The body couldn't sustain it.

"It wouldn't have given me any side-effects like the illegal drug as long as I was aware of the time limit. That had helped me heaps. "

"It's still better not to use that move."

Sharnid understood. Even he himself wouldn't want to use that dangerous a move for multiple times. But this was Grendan. A city with the most intense fights and most frequent fights with filth monsters. The strength of Grendan's Military Artists was stronger than that of any other cities. What was more was that Sharnid had seen for himself the strength of a Heaven's Blade successor. It was certain that he couldn't have won against those Military Artists if he didn't use that move.

But.....

"Why were you so reckless?"

"Hey, hey. I don't want you, the symbol of recklessness, to say that to me."

True. Layfon had acted recklessly many times since coming to Zuellni. He didn't know how to retort as Sharnid complained with a bitter smile.

"But I was very clear that I was being reckless. I also thought I'd try not to use it as much as possible. Concentrate on increasing my real strength. But this move would lose its meaning if my strength catches up to it. Isn't that so? I'm not someone who likes to sacrifice a move."

"Uh....."

"So there's no helping it here, in Grendan. I was already prepared to use that move when the occasion requires it. And I finally got to try that move thanks to you. Then all I need to know

is the time limit. But I tried not to think of it. Let's head back home after we wake up tomorrow, and end this tour. This is what I truly want now."

"....."

"But the problem is Nina. She's even more reckless than you. What would she do? She'd go on a rampage even though her strength is not enough. This time she even has the redundant Haikizoku. Her level of recklessness would increase. Even I wouldn't know what to do."

Anxiety filled his tone. He seemed to be shaking his head.

Doubt surfaced again.

"Senpai. Why did you come to save the captain?"

"Ha?"

"Because you knew you were being reckless? Besides, your moves are restricted..... Speaking in truth, you're really reckless."

"This integrity without decoration is also part of your personality though it's only limited to fights."

"Uh..... sorry."

"That's all right....." Sharnid sat up. Layfon sat up too.

"I knew. I already said many times that I knew I'm being reckless. Still, I did it. Didn't I say that at the beginning? I can't

stand this level of insult. I came to get vent my anger. Can't I even do that?"

"....."

Layfon heard his "heh heh". The laughter was a bit shy.

"But I'm not the impulsive type. Though sometimes I do act impulsively, putting my life on the line..... If you had to say I'm of a certain type, then I'm the type to throw his life away for a woman."

"For a woman.....? Eh.....?"

Layfon's mind turned completely blank. For a woman.....? Though it was a bit, really, he felt just a little bit that Sharnid did like Dalshena. The event happened in the past, but Sharnid did say so. Therefore, Layfon felt that he still liked her. He didn't know whether Dalshena knew, but Sharnid should still like her now.

But she wasn't here. Layfon remembering hearing that she was injured in the fight, but she should have recovered now. But she hadn't come. That must be because Sharnid hadn't told her of it. Or Sharnid said something to throw her off the track. Or perhaps she herself had chosen not to come. Either way, she wasn't here. Then " for a woman". He meant.....

"Hey, right now, are you misunderstanding me to the extreme? No. This isn't what you're thinking at all. I'm not saying that Nina isn't a beauty but she isn't the type I like."

"The type." What would Nina have thought if she had heard of this? Layfon couldn't imagine it.

"Eh? I see? Then....."

"Well, this is to do with the personality. You should also know that Nina finishes what she does from start to finish with vigor. She isn't like the Student President who can always think about it, consider it, and then allocate the job to a suitable subordinate. The Captain relies on her vigor and she finishes the job with her subordinates who got involved. If I was to choose, I'd like a boss like our Captain even though she doesn't consider things much, like an idiot. But her personality to only think of what lies before her isn't too bad. Besides, there might be many changes in the process even though she only heads in one direction. Karian and Dinn could think about strategies, but Nina is different. No. I don't think she has great strategies but....."

"Bad balance?"

"Yes, that's it. No security. It hasn't been boring thanks to that. I don't feel like I'm only doing something for show. Instead, the job is filled with excitement and fun. Life would become very boring if that kind of fun things disappear. Do you understand?"

"Well....."

Layfon seemed to understand and not understand.

"Well, I only thought of this because I don't seem to know what I want to do."

His sudden words stabbed deep into the hole in Layfon's heart.

"Eh?"

"It's like that. Not that I don't hold any feelings about Nina's wish to protect Zuellni, but that feeling disappeared the moment I became her subordinate, pushing all responsibilities to her. If one had to say clearly, this is a responsibility a Captain should bear..... How should I put it? It makes me look cheap."

"Is that so?"

"In the end, I just didn't want to get bored. I already forgot my resolve, even my pretense. These kind of things already left me when I was in my previous platoon and when we lost the Military Arts Competition. Perhaps they really were the things I was chasing after. I encountered many things and failed to reach my goal in my previous platoon. Isn't it cool to then realize those things in the 17th platoon?" Sharnid said.

But Layfon couldn't feel any of those feelings in his words.

"But I stopped moving. After that incident, I pushed the responsibility to Dinn in the 10th platoon. And I pushed the responsibility to Nina, to them. 'Ok, what do you guys want me to do next?' I haled on this kind of thinking. That's not cool at all."

"....."

Layfon couldn't say anything. Not that he couldn't totally comprehend Sharnid's words.

"Ok, what do you guys want me to do next?"

This sentence could also be used on Layfon himself. No. It was too suitable. Layfon came to Zuellni, not wanting to fight and having no reason to fight. Having been deceived by Karian, Layfon entered the 17th platoon and have been fighting till now. He fought in the platoon matches, he fought against the filth monsters, and he fought other Military Artists. The fighting strength belonged to Layfon, yet he had been fighting, pushing the reason of the fights to Nina. Layfon himself didn't clearly want to fight. He only fought by giving that reason to Nina and obeyed her directions as time passed.

"Not everyone can live a life pleasing to him. And I don't think that is the best way to live. But well, even someone who lives by listening to somebody's order would hope to have a clear reason for it. That's better than me who only wants to play cool. I said it's for women, but I just want to look cool."

This was Sharnid's way of thinking. Layfon had no reason to do the same as him. Even acting on Nina's order was a decision in itself. But was this really good? He hadn't thought of it. He hadn't done something that he absolutely had to do, so he had been living by listening to Nina's order.

He'd have no place to go if the Academy City expelled him. If that happened, he could only drift from city to city. Still, there were ways to live even if he was in other cities. But the same thing might occur. Filth monsters attacking. The city's Military Artists could do nothing and so Layfon would have to take up the Dite again. There was no other way of survival.

Layfon would not pick the choice of not salvaging the worst situation when clearly it was doable. He himself should have picked a choice, but he abandoned it when the larvae attacked Zuellni. Still, he was the one who made the decision even though he was helped by Nina and Leerin.

Even if he were to seal off the Katana as his last line of defense, he had taken the Katana back up because of his foster father's forgiveness. The situation had changed. It was all right even if icy gazes were to reproach him, except he couldn't ignore the fact that his resolve was collapsing bit by bit.

(Then it's the same no matter where I go.)

Perhaps this thought had always been in him, somewhere inside him – whether it was the time when Karian found out of his identity, when he was fighting the larvae, and when Zuellni's Military Artists were being impotent.

(Perhaps I can't give up being a Military Artist.)

Had he not thought of this before? Then why had he been fighting, listening to Nina's directions?

(I.....)

He can't deny it.

All the choices left to him were choices he didn't want, so he had picked the best out of those choices. Anyone would have done this. No one would blame him even though Layfon did it.

(I.....)

What was he fighting for? For his own future in the Academy City? For the path outside of being a Military Artist? Or for the new path of life that he would be content with? He stepped back into the Military Arts role because of Nina and the others. This might not be bad. He had thought of this too.

He had thought that to include Military Arts in this new road of life might not be a bad decision, but he failed to speak of the reason behind his fights.

What was the evidence that living a life of a Military Artist was good? Was he only using the reason that "it isn't too bad to fight with Nina and the 17th platoon?"

If this was the case, what would he do if the 17th platoon disappeared? And they were in this kind of a situation.

Judging from what he heard from Nina, perhaps Lucia's words were right. Leerin had already decided to stand in a place without Layfon.

Then, what next?

(I.....)

What does he want to do with Leerin?

(I.....)

No matter what, he couldn't think of an answer.

He watched the ceiling next to Sharnid who had laid down again.

Chapter 2: Beasts of the Moonlight Bare Their Fangs

Layfon had spaced out as he looked at the ceiling.....

"....."

Leerin was also looking at the ceiling. She was living in a room prepared for her in the palace. Since it was impossible to move her into the Eutnohl house right away, Alsheyra had prepared this room for her. She had also introduced the maids who were to look after Leerin and who also made Leerin really uncomfortable. However, the maids didn't seem to care and they accepted her naturally. They had been looking after her until she fell asleep.

Leerin could breathe easily, as she was finally alone.

The bed was the same design as the one in Saya's room, with a similar ceiling too. The bounciness of the bed that Leerin had never experienced before made her unable to calm down and sleep.

So one couldn't say she wanted to look at the ceiling.

"....."

And that wasn't the only reason behind her inability to sleep.

She felt an unfamiliar feeling as she touched the thing covering her right eye. She felt its surroundings and that feeling was not something she had had before.

The eyepatch. This strange thing covering her right eye failed to calm her down.

She thought she would get used to it one day but she was also scared of getting familiar with it.

(This must be.....)

This signified the past and present Leerin, signifying that she had made a choice to part with her past.

(What.)

She silently scolded her thinking. How long was she to fiddle around with it when she had already made up her mind? Besides, she already told Derek those words. She couldn't turn back. Was her resolve not enough? She had determined to give up the name of Marfes. Was this not enough? Did she need anything else? Or did she have to give up the name Leerin as well? If she were to do that.....?

A whirlwind of uneasiness rose in her chest. She curled into a ball, unable to even look at the ceiling. The gentle feel wrapping around herself could take off some of the burden on her but it failed to ease off the pressure in her heart. Derek had left to stop Layfon. Though they had yet to fight, the fight would happen. Once Layfon had decided to act, the fight would happen.

Leerin and Layfon's adopted father was that kind of a person.

(So I shouldn't meet with Layfon anymore.)

Layfon and Derek. The outcome of this fight was obvious. Layfon would win. This was a matter of fact. Layfon became a Heaven's Blade successor at age ten. A Heaven's Blade successor that Derek had not become. Looking from a normal angle, Derek's job to prevent Layfon's footsteps wouldn't have worked. But he was his adopted father. Could Layfon keep moving forward even though his adopted father, who should have already reconciled with him, came to stop him?

And there was one more thing.....

Leerin's body curled up more as she thought of it, her hand applying more pressure on the right eye.

"What have I done....."

The feeling of regret assaulted her all of a sudden, though she didn't consciously think of it. She regretted it a lot after thinking of the gap of strength between Layfon and Derek. This feeling came naturally, a natural feeling whose aim was to break down Leerin's resolve.

A thorn.

Looking from the viewpoint of the abstract, this was a thorn. One of the thorns growing on a plant. This thorn entered Derek..... .. This image floated up in Leerin's mind. One of the thorns on the wheel of thorns etched onto her right eye ball had entered Derek's body.

What did that imply?

And for this to happen, could it be..... She kept thinking of it and knew this wasn't the way to be. As she said already, she couldn't keep thinking of things to confuse herself.

"I must keep my spirits up," she said in a small voice, curled up on the bed. No one replied. This feeling made her lonely but her body could not curl up anymore. She hugged herself tightly. She kept this pose as the feeling of bitterness and pain flowed in her till it blocked her ears. She suddenly noticed some movement above her.

She was shocked as she turned around.

A beautiful girl who suited the darkness in the room stood before her.

It was Saya.

"Can't sleep?" she asked in a faint voice.

"You too.....?" Leerin sat up opposite Saya, still shocked.

"It seems a crisis is near. I can't sleep in this situation."

As expected there were no emotions in Saya's reply. The feeling Saya gave off in her words was similar to the beautiful Psychokinesist Leerin met in Zuellni. No. Saya's words were more mechanical.

"Crisis?"

"Yes."

Saya was the prototype of all Electronic Fairies. Rumor had it that all Electronic Fairies were imitations of her. This meant the crisis Saya felt must be filth monsters. She could feel the filth monsters and evade them just like the Electronic Fairies. But Saya had been sleeping in the Inner Court of the palace. The Haikizoku named Grendan took care of things like filth monsters and the movements of other cities while Saya slept. Hence, the crisis she felt shouldn't be as simple as mere filth monsters.

"Has it happened yet?" Leerin finally pushed the doubt through her throat.

"I'm not sure. The condition of this side is not complete and the opponents have no reason to wait for us. Of course, I have no proof that they're ready."

"Then....."

"Though I can feel the crisis looming, I don't yet know the real form of our opponents."

"I see."

"Yes."

Leerin didn't know what to do as she looked at Saya, nodded emotionlessly.

Uneasiness. Though she had asked Alsheyra what to do, she herself didn't know how to put down this sense of uneasiness. Alsheyra had said not to do anything. The cause was that things

would happen as long as the condition had been satisfied. Alsheyra would protect Leerin until that time came.

The Queen, Alsheyra, had told Leerin so. No Military Artist in Grendan or in other cities existed with a strength greater than the Queen's. Leerin must be in this world's safest place. So Leerin's uneasiness must be unrelated to this? Once she made up her mind, many changes had occurred around her. Why did those changes happen? They must be things happening in response to the next event. So Leerin felt uneasy. Though she knew she had no other way, she still felt uneasy.

She was uneasy when thinking of whether she had made the right choice.

She was uneasy, wondering whether she could perform what she had to do, wondering whether the progress of things would be smooth.

She was uneasy as she thought of whether her actions were right or wrong.

But she didn't understand what was right. She only understood that something was to happen. This understanding was not enough to remove her unease. The information was too vague.

"But something is to happen, right?"

Saya woke from her slumber in response to the looming crisis. Her awakening implied something was about to happen.

The pupils of the girl of moonlight were looking at the window covered by curtains. Leerin was troubled a bit as she thought of drawing aside the curtains or not.

Perhaps it was about to rain. Contrary to the good weather in the morning, dark clouds were closing in from a distance where they guarded the night sky. The city would have changed its direction under the normal circumstances but this was impossible. Because Grendan had stopped moving.

"Looks like a deluge in coming," Dixerio said in a small voice as he looked at the dark clouds slowly drift close. The humidity in the air was increasing. It seemed it definitely would rain.

A heavy rain would not affect the city's air shield. The air shield would filter the pollutants in the raindrops that fell through it. The city's air and water purification systems were working hard, as incidents of unfiltered rain had occurred.

The rain blocked outside the air shield would turn into fog as the air shield prevented the raindrops from entering the city. The pollutants would merge with the fog and surround the city in a black layer. This scenery made one feel uncomfortable.

But it was another kind of entertainment to gaze at the scenery in these circumstances.

All that happened in Zuellni was to end in Grendan. The reason of everything, the pollutants that encircled Grendan implied something was to happen. Dixerio ate the bento he bought for lunch as he watched the scenery, standing on the city's outskirt.

"You look relaxed."

Dixerio was not surprised even though he was suddenly spoken to.

"Just what are you thinking.....?"

He had no need to turn around. A beautiful girl wearing a dark dress stood behind him, looking as if she was to melt into the night .

"What am I thinking? I just want to realize that child's dream."

A stirring in the voice. Dixerio could tell the girl was laughing.

"Deliberately. In this situation?"

"But one wouldn't understand if it's not in this situation? You think so too. Of course, for a Military Artist a problem of a similar level would appear after he overcomes the obstacle of a certain level. Especially for the Military Artist whose strength leaps after obtaining the Haikizoku. He can't escape this problem."

"....."

True. But how many Military Artists could exude Kei that outran the permissible limit of a Dite? This meant the power that was on par with a Heaven's Blade successor.....

Nelphilia, the girl of night continued. "But to have lost his weapon while fighting desperately and then obtained it again..... There shouldn't be many who have had this experience? If it was different, he's either a stray dog I picked up or an Electronic Fairy's ....."

Nelphilia suddenly stopped. Her gaze fell on Dixerio's back. Though Dixerio didn't like it, he still felt it.

The girl was smiling.

"It might be an interesting contrast."

"Humph."

"But no one knows the outcome of things."

"Any outcome is the same. The end is almost immediate. I've just a bit more left for my job. I don't care who it is. Ignasis, Riggzario, Airen..... I'd destroy anyone who stands in my path."

"So scary."

Dixerio ignored her voice of false feeling, draining the water left in the bottle.

"But I must meet with Saya."

"Ara, why?"

"There are things I want to find out from her."

"Even now you still want to confirm the event of that day?"

"No need."

"Ara?" Nelphilia still found it strange.

"No matter what happened on that day, this reality will not change. The things I've to do will not change. So there's no need to confirm the past anymore..... There's something I have to know so that my fangs are pointed in the right direction."

"Is that something you can't get from me?"

"That won't work."

"Ara, why?"

"Because you..... Never mind. Nothing."

Dixerio spoke half of what was in his mind and shook his head. Though it was better to thoroughly solve the problem about Nina, it would only create redundant commotion. He didn't have room to waste energy on that issue right now. Besides, he had tasted his impotence because of Nelphilia. The time he had spent on Nina was wasted. Thinking of that, he didn't want to waste any more strength.

"Nothing else. All I can do is let loose the hound and tidy up the prey the hound has caught up with."

Nelphilia's mood hadn't changed. Finding that something troublesome had flown to his head, Dixerio lifted his head to watch the moon.

The inside of the air shield was very tranquil but the scenery outside the air shield seemed different. The typhoon was pushing the dark clouds to Grendan's sky. The dark clouds covered half of the city, blocking off half of the moon. The mirror of darkness was clearly reflected on Grendan. The dark clouds were swiftly covering Grendan and the moon as Dixerio observed, till the moon also quickly vanished from his side.

"I wonder whether that thing alone can manage till success?"

"Perhaps."

The clouds covering the entire city still moved with the wind, showing no signs of stopping. The layers of dark clouds slowly weaved together like black moss growing on cotton until they totally swallowed Grendan's sky.

Or, it was like a huge dam swallowing the rapids of a river.

"Never mind. It doesn't matter how it turns out."

Dixerio didn't know this city's fate. He only knew that those guys would move close once Saya woke up. And he could only get close to those guys' headquarter in this time.

"You should still have things to do for that?"

"Yes. But those guys....."

Dixerio's gaze moved from the moon to the city. Artificial light suppressed the darkness blocking off the moon. Groups of light crafted out the city's shape to resist the darkness. But the opponent was still quiet. It was only hiding its presence.

"Will it make a ruckus?"

"For sure."

"Isn't it better to do it quietly?"

"Probably. Either way, it's troublesome if it lures in a few Heaven's Blades or the Queen."

"What a troublesome dog. That side also is relaxed."

"Those things can be brought back as long as it returns to the hole."

"That's true. Really. This is what happens in a normal world. It might fast become something I don't need anymore," Nelphilia sighed.

"What? You still want to say you're human?"

"If we use that definition, it's the same for you and me and all Military Artists."

"I'm not stubborn on whether I'm human or not."

"You might be like that but, your way of thinking....."

"Uh?"

"Never mind. That's part of your end. Besides, for you, you aren't afraid of any end."

"Because my ending has been decided already."

"Even your own death is the same as your wish and prediction? Perhaps your desire is stronger than anyone else's."

"You should know what kind of person I am."

Nelphilia shrugged.

Dixerio stood up and took out the Dite from his weapon harness.

"Then let's begin."

"..... Geez."

The figure behind Dixerio moved as the moonlight girl waved her hand. Dixerio kept trying not to look at her. It was better not to look at her as he knew her beauty would conquer his heart. What he was about to do right now was pretty important.

"All right. You can go and make a huge ruckus."

Her voice seemed far. At the same time, he felt her presence retreating and finally disappeared.

"But the time is limited."

But he could still hear her.

That wasn't the only change. No one would have perceived such a tiny change? No. The people who existed here to notice that change weren't here.

Next came the other change.

The tiny change occurred in the artificial light. To say it correctly it was the face of the light because it hurt one's eyes to discern the seven lights.

And, and, one more change.....

"You have to take care of it because it's begging for new bait."

A tiny light appeared before Dixerio but that light swiftly expanded into a huge flame. It continued to burgeon and then it spat out a figure. A female writhed with fire.

"Bait like her."

"I know....."

Dixerio restored his Dite.

As if responding to the sound that restored the Dite, the girl of flame attacked him.

Gorneo found her.

Tonight was a clear night in which one could see the moon. But because the moon was too clear, so clear that it exuded a feeling of something dignified. Tonight was such a night as if the moonlight was filtering through a layer of ice, allowing its icy cold to slowly seep through the skin, making the people forget that the city had entered a tropical zone. Still, sweat continued to gush out from Gorneo's chest as he was constantly jumping and running, seeping through his clothes.

Where would that girl go?

In the end, he decided to search for Shante by moving from one rooftop to the next.

(Why am I doing this?)

He still asked himself this question even though he didn't want to deliberately think of it. Why? Why did he have to run around to search for her?

He had been caught into different kinds of trouble since entering Zuellni and meeting Shante. Shante had a habit of acting like a beast because of her upbringing. Her education with humans started from zero at the time when Gorneo started teaching her.

Though Shante had grasped hold of human knowledge, she still acted before she thought, something she did out of habit, and any troublesome things that rose from her actions were dealt with by Gorneo.

The troubles that Shante caused were of a basic level. Gorneo would have stopped interacting with her if not for her talent in Military Arts. She was an exceptional Military Artist. Her ability was very useful in an organized fight. Besides, Shante herself seemed to really like Gorneo as she obeyed his instructions in the fights. Perhaps because of her childhood, living as part of a pack of animals to hunt preys, she might have viewed Gorneo as the leader of the pack.

The two of them were invited into a platoon, helping to turn the fifth platoon into one of the number one teams in Zuellni, and recently they almost took first place alongside Vance's 1st platoon.

"Really!" Gorneo complained and jumped again. His large body looked weightless underneath the in the moonlit city as he moved speedily over buildings.

Where was she? Would she be somewhere higher? Gorneo continued to leap through the night sky of Grendan, heedless of the consequences.

"That idiot.....!" he murmured and continued to jump.

He continued leaping from building to building but he failed to find a clue. The only place of his search was Grendan because she couldn't be in anywhere else but here.

But why?

He believed that masked crowd was related to Shante's disappearance, but why had they targeted her? He had no idea why. He admitted Shante's physique was special. There was something she could do that even the Queen couldn't. Maybe the masked crowd wanted her physique. They wanted to capture her and use her in an experiment. But then why in that kind of place and with that timing?

Even Gorneo himself couldn't think of an answer. There were too few clues for speculation. Perhaps those nerds in the Alchemy Department had yielded to their curiosity to set this trap, or perhaps Shante was just lured to Grendan by her hunger for Grendan's food, and then there might be a trap to catch wild beasts next to the food.

That was why Gorneo was now jumping in Grendan.

He continued to leap and finally found her.

"Uh....."

On top of a building that wasn't that high.

For a moment, Gorneo thought that thing was a decoration on top of the building. That type of decoration could only be found on old buildings.

It was one of them..... but either way, it just looked too big..... .... Through the weak light. Gorneo only understood after having his gaze stay on that thing for a long moment.

That figure was doing everything she could so no one knew she existed.

As if she was afraid of something.

In order to escape someone's eyes.

A feeling of waiting for something to walk past her. She held such a desperate mental preparation. That was why she kept very still.

"Shante!"

He had already decided what to do once he found her. Of course, to shout angrily. That was his decision. But in reality he breathed in deeply several times to dispel the exhaustion and anger in him. He couldn't scold her after noticing her unusual behavior.

Because she failed to detect his presence. Usually, she was very sensitive to him.

Her body that was intending to become a stone trembled, she turned around and saw him.

".....Gorneo!" she shouted with widened eyes and leaped for him. Her arms hung about his neck and she hugged him with unusual strength.

"Gorneo! Gorneo! Gorneo!"

She continued to shout his name as she buried her head in his chest. One could feel that she really could melt into his body.

"Slow down. Shante..... hey, what's the matter?"

He was used to her hugging him but she had never hugged him with so much strength, and he had never seen her so frightened. She was usually very lively and optimistic. A girl without any evil thoughts. Someone who was the same inside and out. She laughed when she wanted, got angry when she wanted. She never hid her emotions. All her feelings were shown on her face.

That was why he was used to her reaction and action. That was why he was anxious at her unusual behavior.

She stopped calling his name. She put all her weight onto her arms that were encircling his neck, and she curled up, biting her thumb like a baby. The shaking of her small body was sent into Gorneo's without reserve.

Gorneo looked at her. He didn't know what to do. Should he return to the Luckens home or head straight back to Zuellni? There shouldn't be anything he needed to take back with him. He suddenly realized that he had taken off his fighting suit in Zuellni.

What he was wearing now was just the clothes he wore for practice. The density of a fighting suit..... The fighting suit could prevent pollutants from invading his body. That was something he should take back. Not that Grendan's fighting suits were worse though.

Anyway, Shante wouldn't want to see any unfamiliar faces right now. Gorneo himself wouldn't feel comfortable bringing her to his own home, a house full of strangers to her. It was better to return to Zuellni to calm her down.

"Uh."

He had decided.

He sat down. Shante curled up on top of him with her legs crossed like a baby.

"Really....." he complained as he patted her head. She lifted her head to look at him and then closed her eyes. She must not have slept after coming to Grendan, and several parts of her body were dirty. Either way, he had found her. He patted her head with a soothed heart.

That was it. The density of the fighting suit. Let it go. Grendan's technique wouldn't be behind Zuellni's. Besides, Grendan's scientists kept honing their skill to meet Cauntia's challenges. Grendan's technique would not be behind Zuellni's.

In that case, he could only act. But let's wait a bit. Wait till she had slept. Keep himself still like this until she falls into a deep

sleep. After that, he could head straight for Zuellni. He knew Shante could sleep better this way.

But he had made a mistake. He should have moved once he had decided.

Because it was already too late even if he were to move immediately, and that event would still happen even they were in Zuellni.

Even so..... it was wrong to reproach him.

"..... What?"

He felt the air had changed.

The drifting cloud cover hid the moon. The artificial light in this vicinity was already stronger than the light of the moon.

It was already too late by the time he realized this.

The sound of rumbling thunder came from somewhere in the distant sky. Flashes of light illuminated the clouds. Gorneo didn't know what was happening. The tension felt different from a fight. The feeling of having pressed a wrong button of a control mechanism stimulated his skin. He couldn't quite express this feeling with words. He could do nothing but feel strange at this.

It was already too late.

"Ah!"

The sudden heat in his arms made him stand up but he didn't push away that heat. His instinctive reaction was to drop that heat source but he controlled it by sheer will. The heat source leaped from his arms in high speed.

That heat source was Shante.

"Hey....."

"....."

Kei emitted from Shante's body, increasing so speedily that it changed into heat.

"Could it be....."

He could only watch this in shock.

Usually the controlled Kei would become ripples. Those ripples would become waves for stronger Military Artists and then they were turned into external Kei. The redundant ripples created heat. However, the current situation was different. It was impossible to keep releasing heat only.

..... In that case, this must be Karen Kei.

"Hey, Shante!"

She didn't reply. With her back facing him, she seemed to be searching for something. Her arms were by her sides. She hadn't

touched her Dite. Without the restored Dite, the Karen Kei had no medium. Did that mean this phenomenon was created because she wasn't holding a Dite?

Heat twisted the scenery. He could clearly see the artificial light was separated into seven colors in the twisted air.

"Shante. Stop!"

The heat surrounding her had risen to an unbelievable level. Gorneo took a step back as she leaped forward.

"Hey!" he roared but she didn't stop. She headed for the city's edge with shocking speed, leaving only a red afterimage.

"Damn!"

Again. The same as that time.....

Someone was controlling her.

"Damn!" he shouted and chased after her.

"Wait up!" he kept shouting but she didn't stop. The distance between the two of them widened, showing no signs of shrinking. Her figure became smaller and smaller in his sight.

Until she disappeared.

"Shante....."

He kept leaping in her direction and soon, he found her again.

A colossal pillar of fire was burning in the air on the city's edge.

A feeling he was used to came through the iron whips in his hands . It was heavy and strong, as if it was sucked to his palms. He gazed at the thing closing in on him as he felt that feeling in his hand.

A beautiful woman.

If one was to say that Nelphilia was beautiful beyond a demon, then this woman before him was beautiful beyond imagination. Flame writhed around the important parts of her naked body. The spear was pointed at the sky like an army's flag. The flame emitting from her body seemed to have let her red hair melt with her surrounding flames, making the flames obey her.

The woman leading the army of fire closed in on him.

Her name was the Fire God. That was how they called her. He took her power in the midst of battle against the Wolf Faces, abandoned her in the City of Forest Erupa, and she came to Zuellni through the playing of fate. She was Dixerio's spoils.

The Fire God.

Shante.

Her fangs were now biting down on him.

He had been waiting for this for a long time.

The spear went straight for his head. Originally, the point of the weapon was used to stab, and its handle used to bash.

Dixerio backed away and effortlessly avoided the attack.

The flame writhing up the spear scattered because of the impact and turned into a gigantic fire pillar, painting the night sky of Grendan red. Nothing existed in the city that could see this scenery. The world had been twisted by Nelphilia's power. Right now, Dixerio and the others were in Grendan that was in its original world but was also not in its original world. He was in this strange situation as he fought the Wolf Faces in the morning. The Wolf Faces used their rare powder to make this possible whereas Nelphilia used another method. That was why her originally white skin had turned greener without a hint of life. A sense of tragic was mixed in with her beauty. Still, she was beautiful and she was smiling as usual. Dixerio rested the metal whips on his shoulder as he faced Nelphilia with his back, using external Kei to dissipate the heat around him.

"Allow me to have a filling meal."

He covered his face with his left hand. As his hand left his face, a beast mask appeared. Green Kei enveloped his entire body. His Kei was increasing exponentially. He poured the Kei into his metal whips and released it.

Internal and external Kei combination – Raijin.

The explosion of internal Kei allowed his speed to increase tremendously. The external Kei in his metal whips was making sparks because of friction.

Dixerio rushed the Fire God, becoming like a streak of purple lightning. He was aware that the righteous anger of the God of Fire was aiming at him. She hadn't missed his every move even though he was in a world of extremely fast speed.

And the flame gathered in front of her chest in high speed.

"Heh!"

He couldn't not feel surprised about that. It was too late for him to stop the attack or change his direction because these two moves weren't taken into account for this move. This was a move for fools . Dixerio whipped out the whip that was previous curled. At the same time, the gathered flame had reached its peak and exploded.

The pressure of the explosion and the lightning clashed. The sound of the clash was like a beast's howl.

The two energies canceled each other. Dixerio ignored the soles of his shoes, which were quickly turning black because of friction as he backed away and away.

"Still as fast as before!"

"Don't die," Nelphilia said icily behind him.

"Then please move back a bit more!" he shouted as he increased the Kei inside him but the Fire God was faster than him. She was already near him and was stabbing at him with her spear. Dixerio, judging he couldn't cleanly avoid this attack, decided to counter with his whips.

The two of them exchanged several rounds, but they had not finished. The God of Fire continued to close in on him and not letting him widen the distance between them. The outer edge of the city was carved with burnt marks. The two fighters ran on the city's legs. They jumped up at the air shield's exit. The paths of their jump emitted sparks, and the long snake of fire chased after Dixerio.

The Kei from the God of Fire was bottomless. The principle of Kei being released from a normal Military Artist was the same as a heart, but it was obvious that the God of Fire was different.

"Damn!"

The burning air made it hard to breathe. Generating Kei was like how a heart pumped blood. One breathed in the elements one needed into the lungs, allowing those elements to enter the bloodstream and into the Kei vein, and then releasing. Unlike blood, Kei could be turned into internal and external Kei through training, and one could also direct its flow in one's body.

Breathing was needed to generate Kei.

But the flame around him was burning up the oxygen. It was difficult to breathe. In addition, the fire from the Fire God was burning up the essential elements to create Kei. The Fire God's Kei vein was different from a normal Military Artist's. It was of a much more ancient state. The elements in the air..... the Aurora atoms were the true body of the fire. That was why the fire was burning more intensely than usual.

Not much Kei was left for his defense. The flame was making wounds on Dixerio's body one after another.

"..... This is really bad."

Dixerio made a calm decision in this crisis. He was still defending even through the intense fight between metal whips and spear. Once he avoided the stab, his opponent would definitely attack with the handle. He could block with the metal whips once he saw through the direction of the spear handle, and then used the Fire God's power to change his own pose and leap away. Still, the God of Fire would immediately close in on him, never allowing the distance to widen between them.

What he was waiting for was a chance to fatally wound her. Dixerio smelled the burning smell coming from his hair as he pondered. What he wanted was neither the victory or loss after this fight, nor a move to deal a final blow. He breathed in the Aurora atoms that the Fire God's fire hadn't burnt off. He stored the atoms in his Kei vein and waited till the best moment to release them all. Otherwise, he had no chance of winning.

Though heat surrounded him, he could feel the chill on his back , seeping into his body. The tiny pressure originating from his neck did not come from the flame and the Fire God's spear. This was the pressure coming from Dixerio himself. A wish for himself to die was on his neck.

If you don't come, then I'll let you kill me off here. This was the feeling in his hands.

And the closer he moved towards it, the heavier the pressure became.

But...

"Tsk."

The tip of the spear cut across his left shoulder. Blood gushed out. The fire quickly took away the water in the blood. The foul smell of burnt blood filled the air.

The Fire God continued her fierce attack like a storm of flames. Dixerio couldn't find any gaps. The Fire God didn't even save up any to store her Kei. But the Kei that Dixerio stored up through effort was being slowly drained as he defended himself.

(This is getting difficult. But.....)

Why?

He was still calm despite the situation.

According to her function, the God of Fire's power should be the same as before it was taken away, but right now Dixerio was being pressured. Death was quietly waiting, waiting for the tongue of fire to lick his body, waiting to use the sharp teeth to tear his body up. Dixerio couldn't shake off this situation. He had tried many times but couldn't—even though he managed to before.

The Fire God's serious gaze stabbed him. It was more intense than the heat as it pierced his body.

Why?

Had his strength weakened? This was possible. In fact, he was not in his best condition after so many things had happened. Was that why?

But this was different. He was near the thing that had poured strength into his mask. Behind him. Their distance was so short. His strength shouldn't have changed much from before.

Then what was going on?

As expected, that gaze, the Fire God's pair of eyes was what he was bothered with.

Why did she hate him so much? She didn't have that emotion at that time.

"Shante!"

It wouldn't be strange for the sound of the fire to smother this shout. But it still managed to reach the ears of the pondering Dixerio.

"That's.....?"

He didn't need to move his gaze. He was looking at the Fire God to avoid her attack so he immediately saw the figure of the huge man behind her.

A man he didn't know. He also didn't know his name.

But the Fire God responded to him.

"..........!"

The Fire God swung her spear as she called in a low voice. The intense attack carried with it a swaying heart. This allowed Dixerio a chance to open some distance. The Fire God didn't immediately shorten the distance between them. She stood rooted on the spot, looking at the unexpected arrival of the man with a surprised expression.

"Shante!" the man shouted again.

"I see. You've lived like a human."

Dixerio understood.

A heart of anxiety, doubt and chaos calmed down through rationality. The God of Fire had not moved. She was calling out with a threatening sound at the man who was trying to get close to her. But the man couldn't get through either way because of the mad flames. She couldn't even notice that part. It appeared the God of Fire was really anxious.

"Humph....."

(To be alive.....)

This should be called a change. Just like the City of Debris to change its name to the City of Strong Desire. Or like Dixerio Maskane, who was born in that city and had become a beast of revenge.

As long as one was alive, his life would continue to change. Such a change was making the Fire God stop her attack and movement. Her gaze left Dixerio. Her heart was moved as she watched the man.

She was in a battle but she stepped out of it.

He would not let this chance go.

Dixerio rested the metal whips on his shoulder. The black metal added pressure to his shoulder. Kei continued to enter the metal whips through the mask. His Kei vein stirred as the Kei ran. Internal Kei filled his limbs with strength. External Kei turned into destructive energy as it entered his metal whips.

The Fire God noticed the change and turned around.

But it was too late.

Internal and external Kei combination – Raijin.

Dixerio had already released his move.

His body became a streak of lightning. The remnants of Kei blew away the flame as Dixerio came to stand before the God of Fire. The metal fangs from his shoulder bit down into her shoulder . The Fire God's legs lost their power and she fell face down onto the ground, her body being bounced back up into the air because of the rebound.

The red hair lost its vitality before Dixerio's eyes, and the feeling in his hands told him of the result.

He had won.

"Shante!"

The remnants of Raijin had blown out the surrounding flame. The world turned from sudden red back into original night. The remnants of battle called forth the original silence.

But, not everything had ended.

"Shante!"

The man ran for the immobile God of Fire. He lifted her up. The fire enveloping her was gone. She was now just a naked girl.

"Hey, Shante, hang in there!" The man's face turned white.

"Hey, did you hear me? Damn, I'm taking you to the hospital."

"Sorry, but it's useless as long as you're in this world."

"You bastard!!"

"But how did you come here? You don't look like a descendant of Grendan's royalty. Did other people get you involved or.....? "

Dixerio took down the mask, but the mask did not disappear into the air like the usual.

"Did you get dragged into it because you've been following her for too long?"

"Who are you?"

"..... It seems you've been the one looking after her. Since you know her, you must have seen her like that a couple of times already."

"Answer me!"

Gorneo put down the God of Fire and stood up, restored his Dite and readied his pose. The restored Dite covered his fists. He used hand to hand combat. Dixerio seemed to have seen this style before.

Luckens. No. They might not be related.

"Really..... Why do you Luckens always have to block my path ?"

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. The fact never changes that I have to do this."

"Huh!"

Gorneo moved as he felt the murderous intent.

External Kei variation – Metal Bullet.

A condensed bullet released from his fist. But Dixerio used his hand to make the bullet explode before it reached him.

"What?"

Dixerio moved swiftly behind Gorneo, took hold of his hair and pushed him onto the ground. There was only a split second to resist as Dixerio stepped on his stomach.

"Guh."

"Never mind. As long it's all in my original plan. Besides..... a human's memory should have too much effects. It wouldn't become like that. But it's still better to erase the memory if I have time."

He moved his gaze to the God of Fire. She hadn't given up struggling. The pressure from the mask would not lessen till she gave up her struggle.

"Shante! Damn, let me go."

"Give up. That's originally mine. Besides, she's only a weapon in the form of a human."

"These things you said....."

"Well. It matters not to me whether you believe me or not."

Though he did not admit it, the man's face showed his doubt because he had seen things that he had never seen before. No matter how strong a Military Artist was, it was impossible to make the growth of the body be so intense. The most one could do was stop growth or speed it up. The God of Fire before him was usually a girl, but she could suddenly turn into a mature woman when she became a Fire God. This was impossible. That went beyond the boundaries of any living creature. Her body was at the same time in here and over there. In the world of Regios and over in Zero Territory. That explained the changes in her. Her changes became more perfect because she was in this area that was closer to Zero Territory.

"I didn't have to do this if those guys aren't trying to take her back....."

Dixerio hadn't caught up yet at that time.

"Luck really isn't reliable."

The man under his foot still hadn't given up his struggle, but his strength was obviously weaker than before. His heart doubted, doubting whether he should believe Dixerio's words. Knowing the truth of the Fire God was enough to make him doubt.

(His level is only this much.)

Confusion was not needed. The more confusion the less the power. Stubbornness, the good and bad of things, none of these were important. Toss them all behind your brain and head for the road you determine. This was essential to Dixerio.

"....."

The howling of the God of Fire became softer. The flame was gone. The beast mask continued to give out green light, and the light was about to entirely envelop the Fire God.

"....."

The Fire God continued to howl in a low voice.

No. Was this even howling?

"..... Gor.....neo..... Gorneo," the Fire God called.

"......Shante."

The man called her name as if he was sighing.

"Gorneo....."

And the God of Fire kept calling out his name.

"Shante!"

Howl.

The one howling wasn't the Fire God.

It was the man.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!"

External Kei variation – Absolute full power. Fangs.

The Kei that was totally different from before made Dixerio jump away in reflex.

"Tsk!"

The man's fist didn't hit him, but the man didn't care. He ran straight for the Fire God.

Dixerio wanted to catch up with him. He wouldn't let the Fire God release her Kei so he reached out and tried to stop the man.

But he failed.

Dixerio's hand only caught air as the man jumped on the Fire God and took hold of the mask on her chest.

"Oh!"

The power in the mask sent the man flying. Still, he had succeeded. The mask was peeled off the Fire God's body. Dixerio's target changed to the mask dancing in the air. He reached out again.

"Thanks for the help," Dixerio said with lips curled as he confirmed the feeling of the mask. He was being sarcastic but one could feel some goodwill in his words. For some reason, though someone was interfering with his plan, he was happy.

"Really..... Never mind."

Dixerio looked at the Fire God. Her body was in two states as if it was the reflections of light. The mature Fire God and the red haired girl overlapped each other. Slowly, the Fire God figure became translucent while the girl became dense. Dixerio watched as the change became more intense, leaving only the red haired girl behind.

"Shante!"

The man ran for the unconscious girl.

"My aim here is finally reached."

Dixerio put on the beast mask with his back to the man. Dazzling green light covered his face.

The other side of the light said, "Hey, isn't it about time for you to get up?"

The beast mask sent vibrations like a pumping heart, as if to respond to that voice. The vibration went from slow to fast, and then light exploded. A soundless explosion that painted his sight green.

That thing appeared.

It came from the green light but it was a beast that was totally black. Strong fur that was like horns protected its body, and sharp claws of the same strength as the fur were on the paws. A lower jaw shaped like a pyramid revealed a row of sharp teeth in the huge mouth.

A beast appeared in front of Dixerio.

"Oi, Velzenheim. How do you feel?"

After hearing his words, the beast called, dissatisfied.

"Ha. This time it's you who are bad for wanting to eat others. Besides, aren't you gonna thank me for saving you?"

Still, the beast looked dissatisfied.

"..... There's still a next time. Just wait happily for it."

The two of them didn't care about the replies they gave to each other. The relationship between them was that of taking advantage of each other. Dixerio thought he didn't need to say more to this beast with a lowered head. He broke the beast mask in his hand and the beast disappeared in the air like the mask.

"You're....."

The man stared at him.

But Dixerio didn't have to answer him.

"Not sure whether it's your good luck or that that guy is stronger. Either way, thanks."

The man didn't know whether to say he understood Dixerio's words or not. Even if he did comprehend it, he didn't know what would happen.

Nelphilia had given up maintaining the other dimension. The two worlds were once again combined. The weaker side had collapsed. The movement of existence attacked Dixerio and the others with nostalgic.

That was just a split second. Everything ended when he felt that feeling.

The artificial light was brighter than the light before. It enveloped the entire outer edge. He could feel the air was obviously different

"Hey....." Dixerio said with his back to the man. "Treasure your life that you saved with effort. Hurry and escape."

His gaze continued to fix on the sky.

Heavy rain fell from the cloud cover above the city. The black smoke issuing from the moments of rain droplets passing through the air shield covered the entire city. The changes in the dark smoke of dense pollutants didn't escape Dixerio's eyes.

(Have to hurry.)

He said to himself mentally. No time to lose. The other side was getting closer, and he still had things to do. He felt it a waste to spend time on Nina, but either way, time would not come back to him.

"Escape before morning," he said and left.

Nelphilia was gone too.

Leaving only Gorneo holding the unconscious Shante, Gorneo didn't move. Dumbfounded. As if he had just experienced a storm.

Nina didn't know why she suddenly woke.

"..... What is it?"

Though she was doubtful of why she suddenly woke, she noticed Felli sleeping beside her and so talked to her in a small voice, getting up to confirm her surroundings. Nothing seemed out of place. She felt a disturbance but she didn't hear anything.

Nina was skeptical. Was it her dream?

Since she didn't feel like sleeping now, she sat up and looked around. This was Lucia's room. Lucia needed to work, so she was in the workroom on the first floor. What stood out in this room was the bed Nina and Felli were sleeping on. This took up a lot of the space in the room. A lot of space on the bed was left unoccupied even with the two of them sleeping on it. The things Lucia used were quite plain, so this bed and anything special felt out of place.

Considering there was a child here then there must be a father. But he didn't seem to have returned. Lucia also didn't say much about the child's father.

It appeared this was a complicated issue. Thinking of how this might have something to do with how Nina herself got involved, she suddenly thought of something strange.

"No way?" she smiled bitterly.

"What is it?"

"You're still awake?"

"Because I have something to do."

At Felli's words, Nina felt she hadn't been cautious enough. This was Grendan. They were in the enemy's headquarters. Besides, Felli and the others caused quite a ruckus on the way here . Felli was also doing something to interfere with Grendan's Psychokinesists.

"Sorry."

"Just lying down is also resting."

"Really? Then that's good."

The two of them hadn't spoken on the bed because of their conversation before going to sleep. Nina felt like Felli wasn't that mad at her anymore. Since she was talking to her, she must have calmed down.

"Then, you still haven't changed your mind?"

"..... Sorry," she said with her head lowered.

Felli sighed. "Just when will this stubborn brain of yours open up?"

"Uh....."

"Didn't Layfon say it too? Your original aim is to protect Zuellni and restore Zuellni. Increase the number of Selenium mines and avert the crisis the Academy City faces. You shouldn't have forgotten it?"

"How would I!"

"Then why are you staying in Grendan?"

"Didn't I talk about that reason already?"

It appeared that Felli and Sharnid would not let her go that easily.

"The fate of this world? The confusion of the Electronic Fairies, the Wolf Faces, the creation of this world and the secret of Grendan's royalty. Don't know when the threat will appear. I've heard a lot from you."

"".....Do you not believe them?"

"You think they are believable?"

"No, but....."

She didn't know what to say, facing her icy gaze.

"And then you stand on the side of the Electronic Fairies in order to save the world? Just what fairy tale is this? Please come back to the real world before we return to Zuellni."

"Wu....."

Not letting her off. Tonight, Felli was not letting her off at all.

No. This was not part of her personality at all. And tonight she seemed to have grown a body of thorns.

"..... Even if that's the case, this means an intense fight is about to appear in Grendan. Then Zuellni may get caught up in this. Do you understand? Zuellni still hasn't recovered from the filth monsters attack. If the repairs aren't done yet, what would you do? "

"Well....."

Suddenly speechless. Same as the time in the living room, she couldn't say anything.

She knew Felli was right. This was what she should do after calm consideration. Grendan had the Heaven's Blades and the Queen whose strength far exceeded theirs. Nina didn't know what she could do even though she had the power of the Haikizoku.

"If Zuellni can move, then returning to the Academy City will become a problem. Have you thought of how to return if we stay? This is war. The number of roaming buses is low. Besides, originally there aren't that many buses that come to Grendan. This is normal too. Roaming buses don't come often because the city is always at war with filth monsters."

"....."

"..... Captain. How do you plan to return?"

"Uh!"

"Or are you preparing to stay in Grendan? Or to become a Heaven's Blade successor using the Haikizoku's strength?"

"Wu!"

"The 17th platoon would disband without you. And once my brother's not there, I can happily live my Academy life."

"Academy life..... Hey!"

"Yes, if you don't return to Zuellni, that would be the future."

"You can enter another platoon with your strength."

"Why do I have to enter another platoon and be a Psychokinesist when I don't want to? There's no reason for me to stay in Military Arts. I don't know whether you know, but I entered Zuellni as a General Studies student like Layfon."

"But because I'm not there....."

Nina was speechless again.

Because Felli was staring at her with her icy gaze.

"You and Layfon are both too good. I don't know what to say."

"Wh..... What....."

"..... Layfon and I move to your orders. I'd be troubled if you don't think the same."

"You....."

Felli turned around. Nina didn't know what to say, surprised at her unexpected words. This was her first time hearing Felli say her true feelings.

They obeyed because of her. She herself had never considered this possibility. Karian recommended Felli and forced her into the 17th platoon. Layfon was the same. Only Sharnid was the one who entered because of Nina's effort. And she also didn't know why he decided to enter her platoon.

"In the end, I haven't contributed a thing."

This thought had always been heavy on her. The platoon had been winning matches because of Layfon. It was also because of Layfon that she took the flag in the Military Arts Competition. And at that time, he was fighting to rescue the kidnapped Felli. Nina couldn't help him but was helped instead. This made her feel impotent.

"As I thought."

Felli nodded with her back to Nina.

"You're always stubborn. You also aren't that particularly strong . Your strength doesn't stand out. The fight with the first platoon is a good example."

Her words stabbed Nina without holding back. Nina could only lower her head and listen.

"But your stubbornness is what I and Layfon don't have. If I've to say what can be boasted about you, that would be your spirit. No matter how confused you are, in the end, you'd tell us where to head for. On that point alone, you're the best out of the members of the 17th platoon."

"Felli....."

Felli turned her head around, her gaze icy as usual. This called back Nina's tension.

"But now you've forgotten your original aim. You gave up standing in front of us, and decided impulsively to stay. Just what is that for?"

"That's....."

She already told them in the reason in the living room. She could tell from Felli's words that she still remembered. The creation of this world, the speculation about the battle, many, many mysteries. Nina had told them of things that she knew. She used her wish to stay as a prelude to the conversation. To say it recklessly through her emotions was like blurting it out without consideration.

Though it felt heartless, Nina was happy that she said it. Otherwise, she would still be afraid of telling them.

"Even if I believe it, the fate of this world, what can we do? For us who were thinking of how to win the Military Arts Competition only days ago, what can we do?"

Nina wanted to retort but she didn't know what to say.

"Because Layfon's here? But if that's the case, this city has many Military Artists stronger than Layfon. You also saw that didn't you ? Layfon lost. Even so, why do you still want to stay? Because you have the Haikizoku's strength? That thing is incredible."

"That's....."

Incredible? She didn't know what to say. She just thought it was a reckless power. The Salivan Mercenary Gang, the Gang that left Grendan and was led by Haia, moved from city to city to search for that power. But Nina still lost to the Heaven's Blade successor Lintence even while she possessed that power. Was it because the strength of a Heaven's Blade was stronger than a Military Artist with a Haikizoku? Or that because the person who possessed the Haikizoku was Nina?

Why did Grendan want the Haikizoku?

"Do you not care about Zuellni as long as you have power?"

"That's not possible!"

"Then please think calmly of what you need to do next."

"I've been calmly....."

"Stubbornness is your strong point but we only think so when it can help you guide us. If we don't want to follow you, then it's not a strong point."

"....."

"Please think carefully."

Felli buried herself in the sheets.

Nina couldn't sense the sleeping presence. This meant Felli was only lying down. She was still interfering with Grendan's Psychokinesists. Interfering with their senses. Nina wasn't all too clear on the technique of Psychokinesists, but she felt it must be something incredible.

Felli was really incredible.

But even Felli judged it tactless to stay in Grendan. She was implying that it was useless for them to stay even if what Nina said was true.

(Am I forcing myself to be reckless?)

No, this was why she was being reckless. Nina couldn't think of what she was like without being reckless. She had been acting recklessly from the beginning till now, and in the future if she was right about it.

If they were in Zuellni, they would follow Nina's recklessness.

Perhaps. But Zuellni didn't have Heaven's Blades and the Queen. There was no choice but to do it herself. But Grendan was different. It didn't need Nina. The Heaven Blade successors with the Queen at the top of the power chain were here, and there was also a large number of strong Military Artists. There was no place for Nina whose power was still immature and only knew to move recklessly.

Perhaps that was the case.

But.....

(Is this really all right?)

She didn't know. Besides, she had another thought too.

"..... What is Layfon thinking?"

Would Layfon leave Leerin behind in Grendan? Leerin was different from him. Grendan didn't exile her. She had only returned to the place she should return to.

But this explanation bore no relationship to Nina's current problem.

What was Layfon thinking? This was the most important problem to Nina now.

"..... I don't want to think about that." Nina heard Felli say after a long period of time.

Saya held her silence.

A feeling that some kind of noise was about to assault them filled the air, but she couldn't hear it clearly. It must be a noise outside here. The thick walls, glass and curtains were blocking off the outside noise. But still, the noise managed to enter Leerin's ears .

Saya kept silent. Her pupils, bright and translucent like gems, were watching the curtains. No emotions showed on her face. It was impossible to guess from her expression why she wasn't moving.

Leerin also didn't think this was the time to ask why. In the first place, she could never think of her as someone who would engage in unnecessary conversations.

(No..... She's older than me.)

It didn't feel right to call her a child.

Based on her appearance, Saya looked about the same as a senior student, but in fact, she existed since before the birth of this world. It should be more appropriate to say she had gone beyond

such thing as age. But how should Leerin call her then? Was this an important or unimportant question? Either way, it was inappropriate to call her a child. However, her appearance was like a child's.

It might be an unimportant problem, but Leerin couldn't think of an answer to the other problems. They were things that she only barely knew of. And she couldn't sleep now. This was the only thing she could ponder about.

"..... What is it?"

Saya turned around as if she had noticed something.

"Ah, well....."

Looking at Saya's face made her unable to calm down. She felt she was getting a little used to her but that beauty under the moonlight still seeped through to Leerin's heart. It had only been two to three times when they met face to face.

Looking at Saya staring at her in silence made Leerin impatient. Leerin had prepared herself so she talked a lot in the Inner Court when she met Saya. It wasn't that she was more relaxed now so she didn't talk. But she couldn't keep herself this tense forever.

(What am I doing?)

She finally gathered her courage and spoke.

"Uh....."

"....."

Being watched by Saya weakened her,

"Well..... I don't know what I should call you....."

"Call me?"

"Yes. You..... How should I put it? Well..... Aren't you the one who created this world? Then aren't you like a god? So I must be careful when I call you."

"That isn't important. Just call me Saya."

"Is that all right?"

"Yes. I haven't done anything that is worthy of being called a god."

"I think you've done some very great things....."

Saved many people, created this world. Was it very easy to make a world in Saya's generation? But not everyone could save others in a collapsing world.

It seemed she didn't plan to continue this conversation. Saya turned around to face the curtains again. Was something on the other side of this blocked window? Leerin couldn't obtain any information from her face. She only noticed she herself was being attracted by her beauty.

"What are you doing?"

Noticing she was being rude, Leerin came to but was then attracted by that beauty again. This process repeated many times till Leerin asked that question.

"Something is happening outside."

"Uh?"

"It's a familiar feeling."

"Is it an enemy.....?"

"I don't know....."

"What is it?"

"If my speculation is correct, that thing does hold hostility towards me. But this doesn't mean it'll be an enemy."

Leerin didn't understand her, but what was about to happen was slowing revealing itself. This was what she felt, and she couldn't help but hug her shoulders.

And at this time, Saya's shoulders shook.

"It's here, please be careful."

".....Eh?"

No time to even be surprised.

Saya jumped away from her spot. The glass that the curtains covered shattered at the same time.

The curtains were blown apart, blocking Leerin's sight and preventing her from seeing who leaped in from the outside. The humidity in the air entered the room and Leerin's nostrils along with the sound of shattered window. She could tell from the sound that it was raining outside.

Strange changes appeared on Saya's right wrist, but Leerin's eyes could catch those changes that were impossible for a human. Saya already held a metal rod of strange length when Leerin noticed it.

If you were to look at its appearance, it liked similar to a Military Artist's Dite.

"Wait a minute."

Leerin knew from the voice that the person who entered the room was a man.

"Your response is surprisingly fast."

"It seems you're someone I've seen before....."

"Hey, hey, didn't we see each other recently?"

The man's voice didn't hold any hostility. Leerin didn't understand battle but that wasn't the reason her tension eased. The

sudden tension and anger in her suddenly disappeared and she herself found it strange too. She had been very confounded. But what was happening now?

And what was about to happen?

"Perhaps so. To me, it was something that happened in a dream.
"

"Really."

The curtains stopped moving. Leerin saw the man's face. It was a man with red hair.

And someone was behind him.

Leerin saw that person and was shocked.

It felt like a mirror but she immediately noticed the difference. She wasn't sure how to explain it, but the impression was not the same. The feelings exuding from them were different if you were to put them over one another.

Either way, Saya was holding a huge weapon whereas the other side held nothing. She was only standing behind the red-haired man. But it was enough to make Leerin's heart move just with her standing here. She was exuding a demonic attraction that was stronger than Saya's.

"..... Nelphilia?"

The person whom she met in Zuellni, who looked exactly the same as Saya.

And she was the younger sister of the owner of Leerin's right eye. Saya's original. The man who became the moon floating in the sky, who protected this world from Ignasis's hostility.

The woman behind the man looked at Leerin and revealed a beautifully flirtatious smile, as if she was confirming Leerin's thoughts.

"Since time is short, let's hurry up and resolve the problem. The most troublesome thing in this city is about to arrive in ten seconds ," the man said quickly. "There's only one thing I want to know..... .."

At this time, a distant explosion sounded so the man's words didn't enter Leerin's ears. Leerin looked around for the source of the noise as the entire house shook.

Just what did the man ask and how did Saya answer..... Leerin missed it all.

"Thanks."

The man smiled and bowed by the time Leerin noticed him. The sound of explosions continued. Only the man's relaxing expression was genuine in this tense situation. He didn't say anything else and suddenly left. The time limit had probably arrived.

The sound of explosions continued, but this time it was the door .

"Leerin!"

A sound filled with tension rushed into the room. The wind pressure had messed up Alsheyra's hair, who was wearing her night clothes. She was watching the direction where the man had left with furious eyes.

"Don't get ahead of yourself!"

Leerin couldn't see anything from her position. Perhaps Alsheyra saw that red haired man as she was shouting, pointing at the window with anger.

A streak of light shot out from the elegant tip of her finger. Everything quieted down. Leerin could tell what the result was judging by Alsheyra's infuriated expression.

"Unexpectedly difficult," she said and spat.

But her expression changed all of a sudden.

"Wuah~ Are you ok, Leerin-chan? Are you fine? Really, that trash. How dare he enter a girl's room in the middle of the night? What rubbish he is."

Leerin couldn't catch up with her speedy change. Alsheyra was hugging her tightly, pressing down on her face with her breasts. Leerin couldn't think of anything but confusion.

Did she accept the event just like that?

"Nothing happened," Saya said behind Alsheyra. It took Leerin lots of strength to shake off Alsheyra's wrists. The weapon of the girl of moonlight had vanished.

"I won't let him off easy!" Alsheyra howled. "How dare he do that! That dirty man's fingers! I won't let him off easily if his fingernails touched Leerin-chan. I'll slice him into thin pieces starting from his feet when I catch him!"

Murderous intention exuded from her..... but Leerin wasn't scared. She knew she wasn't really mad. She was just worried about Leerin. Everything else was just pretense.

Why did Leerin have this feeling?

"Sen..... Your Majestic, do you know that person?"

"Eh? No. I don't know him. I just don't like his actions."

She gave a firm reply but Leerin felt something more in her words. She accepted it. Did she understand what she was thinking ?

She touched the eye-patch over her eye. Her right eye hurt a little. Why? This right eye that was hers and wasn't hers..... No, this was what the right eye was from the very beginning. It didn't belong to her, but she had it now, and it was functioning as her eye .

Who did it belong to originally? The man who became the moon?

No.

This was just an imitated creation. It was made from the atoms that fell on the moon. The real thing was on the moon. The moon itself was the man's right eye. That must be it.

Then what about this right eye?

Thinking of this, a strange kind of admission came to Leerin.

Yes. This was originally Alsheyra's because Alsheyra had the blood of a Military Artist. Her body was made of atoms. It wouldn't have been possible without the royal families marrying one another. The imitation that was supposed to have been more perfect, Alsheyra, for some reason, deviation occurred in the process. The missing part formed another construction and entered Leerin's right eye. Perhaps an outside force had interfered to cause this. Leerin hadn't had this thought before, but the power in her eye had been discovered. She could explain this phenomenon of calling forth to each other.

(Are we the same person?)

That was why Alsheyra could feel Leerin was in a crisis far quicker than anyone else. Not because her strength as a Military Artist far exceeded anyone, but because a special connection that should have belonged to only one person existed between them.

If that were the case, what effect would it bring?

Leerin had lost the mood to figure out the conversation between the red haired man and Saya. She was more bothered by something else.

"Leerin-chan?" Alsheyra said, but she didn't give a reply.

Alsheyra hadn't noticed the feeling in Leerin but she could tell she was in danger? What meaning did this hold?

"What is it?"

Leerin shook her head. This wasn't a problem she could solve right now. She didn't know whether the speculation coming from a suspicion was correct. Perhaps she would talk about it when the answer was clearer.

Almost time. Immediately like a storm, it arrived.

"It's here," Saya said simply. She watched the window that the red haired man had shattered. Intense wind blew the curtains into the room.

The noise from the outside vanished, making the sound of the rain stand out more. The humidity rushing into the room made the temperature drop. The high humidity was uncomfortable.

Leerin thought she would see the outside better if she changed her position, so she stood beside Saya. Alsheyra was standing diagonally in front of her as if to protect her. No moon was outside . There was only darkness. The artificial light on the ground was

feebly resisting the dark clouds and the smoke caused by the pollutants.

And lightning and rumbles in the sky dominated everything as if to mock this resistance.

It was just a split second, but she saw it clearly.

Cloud cover was behind the fog. The cloud layer made by vapor flowed in Grendan's sky like a large river. It showed no signs of stopping.

Something was between the cloud layer and the black smoke, separating the two colors. Something in a circular shape that was acting like a boulder trying to change the course of the river's flow. But the cloud layer didn't change its direction because of the boulder's obstruction. It continued to flow. If this truly was a river, the water would change its direction when hitting the boulder and create waves and foam. But not now.

It was a black hole.

"Delbone."

"Here. I already noticed it and have given the evacuation order. The Heaven's Blade successors have been called together for the emergency. The Military Artists are waiting on the third defence line. Is this fine?"

"Uh, yes."

Alsheyra stopped the short conversation with Delbone.

Leerin stared at the black hole. The light of seven colors shone from the edge of the hole. It wasn't bright but it stood out. The depth of the black hole seemed bottomless. It looked like a flat surface. Leerin hadn't seen it before but it felt like the thing that had appeared above Zuellni.

She couldn't help but reach up to touch the eye-patch.

Everything was about to begin.

Chapter 3: The assault of a storm

A dream.

"What's dinner for today?"

Toby and Anri called as they ran into the kitchen. The one who came in a bit later was Ranietta, her hair woven into three braids.

"Hey! Isn't this still study time?"

"Already finished!" the younger sister called happily, right after Toby.

"Don't bluff!"

"It's really finished."

"Yes. Anri finished it. I also packed everything away."

"Me too!"

"Toby's bluffing. He hasn't done all his math homework."

"Then what're we having today?"

"Listen!"

Anri laughed as she watched Rainetta speak with all her might.

Leerin, who was preparing the food in the wok, also laughed.

"It'll take a little while yet. Toby, go and finish your homework otherwise you'll get punishment. I'm cutting off a minute of dinner for every minute you don't finish your work."

"Uh!" Toby voiced out his anguish.

Everyone ate from the big dish. This was how it was done in the orphanage. The later one came to dinner, the less portion one received.

Rainetta revealed a "See. I won," smile. Toby's expression was bitter after he accepted it all. Anri saw it all and laughed.

"Layfon-Nii, you say something too," Toby said to Layfon who was sitting on a chair and cutting up the vegetables.

"Layfon-Nii, I was right?" Rainetta said, watching him with a hand on his knee.

"..... Toby, under this situation, you'd have lost if you resist the girls," Layfon shook his head with a 'given up' expression. He could feel the pressure in Leerin's smile behind his back. Layfon thought Rainetta was becoming more and more like Leerin.

"Damn! Layfon-Nii you traitor! Remember this! I won't lose in tomorrow's match!"

"Toby!" Rainetta shouted angrily as Toby escaped from the kitchen, but Toby didn't stop because he must not miss tonight's dinner. Layfon believed he must have gone to finish his homework . After that, Layfon continued to make up the dishes. And so the

habit of not resisting the person who cooked had spread throughout the entire orphanage.

Layfon thought it was pretty scary as he continued to silently cut up the vegetables. The only path for resistance was to choose to cook. Since he still wasn't good at gauging the amount of seasonings needed, he still couldn't lift his head in front of Leerin.

"Well then, Rainetta, Anri. Come and help."

"Ok~" the two answered together and began to help with the cooking. Hearing the girls' laughter, Derek smiled and left the kitchen as he passed it by.

This was the memory of the day before he became a Heaven's Blade successor. Layfon already knew that he would win. He knew the level of his opponent. The possibility of his losing was even smaller than his last digit. In fact, he did win, and at the same time, he found out about the underground matches and seriously began considering entering those matches with his advantage as a Heaven's Blade successor.

Toby came when he was five years old. Derek held his hand as they entered the orphanage. Toby's wrist had a large scar. They found out there was one on his stomach too when he took a shower.

Anri came at age four. She had been crying, not knowing anything and suddenly having her environment changed so drastically. Her crying voice that called out for her mother was

painful to the ears. Toby adapted to the orphanage, doing his best in part to stop her crying.

Rainetta came at age six. At first, she hid in a corner of the room all by herself. Toby, who was the same age as her, was the one who helped her release the knot in her heart. And the three of them, coming to the orphanage, became siblings.

No one existed who came happily to the orphanage, but after coming here, the children received happiness. Smiles appeared on their faces.

A time of happiness was found in that place.

And money was needed to protect this happiness. This was what Layfon thought.

Why hadn't he stopped at the appropriate time? No. Not just that. Why didn't he think of a better way to earn money? If so, things wouldn't have turned out like this.

Ten years old. He was still a kid even though he had the strength of a Heaven's Blade successor. This could have explained his action, but Layfon had always wanted to protect the smiles of Toby and everyone. In the end, he himself took away their smiles.

The happiness existed even without him having to do anything. He destroyed it.

If he hadn't thought of entering the underground matches, Toby wouldn't have looked at him with hatred, Rainetta wouldn't have

hidden herself from him and Anri wouldn't have felt so frightened as she watched them. If that event hadn't happened, Layfon would still be in Grendan as a Heaven's Blade successor and Leerin would be looking after the orphanage while she studied, calling for Toby and the others to do their homework. Their lives would have continued, and Toby and his siblings would come to influence new siblings.

But this was impossible now.

Layfon destroyed everything with his own hands.

Layfon woke from his shallow sleep, shocked.

"Uh!"

Woken up all of a sudden, he roughly tossed off the blanket on him and stood up.

"Wh, what happened?" Sharnid woke too, noticing his action.

"Hey, what is it?"

Layfon touched the Dite next to his pillow. He was not moving. Suspicion filled Sharnid.

"....."

Layfon couldn't answer him.

Something was happening. The air in Grendan gave him a nostalgic feeling. Atoms that could numb one's skin filled the air. But this was noiseless. One couldn't even confirm it.

"Hey, Layfon!"

"Get ready immediately," he said and dressed himself in the fighting clothes that was his pillow a minute ago. Since Lucia had washed it, it no longer had the smell of the underground sewage.

"It doesn't look good," Sharnid said he also wore his own fighting suit.

(What is it?) Came Felli's voice immediately. The flake exuded dim light as it floated above their heads.

"Senpai, did something happen outside?"

(Nothing seems strange in the city but something seems to be happening outside it. It's difficult to decipher. I've spread the flakes outside to confirm the senses. Because of the rain, dense pollutants are surrounding the air shield.)

"Get ready for battle."

(Got it.)

Layfon didn't doubt his own feeling even after listening to Felli's report. He headed for the workroom after he finished his preparations. The room was very dim, filled with the smell of mechanisms. Only the work on the desk was lighted. The baby, Marukuto, was sleeping quietly in the cradle.

"What is it?" Lucia stopped working.

"Please head for the shelter immediately."

"..... Not that I doubt the feeling of a Military Artist, but isn't this a bit rushed?"

"Whether it was yesterday or today, a battlefield is a battlefield."

"I really hate that expression of yours," Lucia showed a helpless expression.

"Nee-san?"

She stood up and took the bag she used for evacuation purpose from the desk. She took up Marukuto. Marukuto moved at the change of position, but it quickly turned quiet.

"Even though it's better to show such a serious attitude in a battle than being lax....." she said and stopped as the evacuation siren rang outside and confirmed his words.

"Nee-san, hurry and head for the shelter."

"Yes. I know."

Lucia didn't say anymore. She carried the baby and left the room. Nina and the others were already waiting in the living room . Tension filled Nina's face, not confusion.

"You're back."

"..... Then, what do we do?"

They must have been waiting for Layfon to return. Sharnid looked at Nina. This wasn't the time to continue the conversation from before they went to bed, but he still wanted to know the result. His expression was eager. Felli's expression was the same as usual, but she exuded a similar feeling to Sharnid's. Perhaps the answer had been decided no matter what Nina would say.

(I.....)

"..... First, let's confirm the situation."

Nina's voice didn't allow Layfon any time to ponder.

"Hey."

"Don't get the wrong idea. If we don't know this has become a battlefield, it'd be difficult for us to return to Zuellni."

Everyone was speechless at her words.

"Captain?" Felli looked at her, incredulous.

"We can't not protect Zuellni when she can't move," she replied before the shocked Sharnid and Layfon.

"Felli, drop what you're doing now. If the situation is as predicted, the other side probably won't have time to bother with us. After confirming the situation, head for the shelter."

"Why?"

"First, this is the biggest crisis. They have to send all the Heaven's Blades to the battle. In this place, we can't move while protecting you. Layfon, where's the shelter that is closest to Zuellni ?"

"Let me be the guide," Lucia said. She had been listening from behind them.

"Thanks," Nina nodded, but Sharnid didn't agree.

"Wait up. Even if it's a shelter, we're still outsiders. Will they capture Felli-chan there?"

"I'll protect her," Lucia said.

"But."

He didn't believe her. His feeling was reasonable. Lucia wasn't a Military Artist. She was an ordinary person even though she was a Dite technician. She had no way to resist if they were to run into authorities like the City Police. Still, she didn't back a step.

"Don't worry, I'll protect her. A majority of people wouldn't do anything. The ones who can do something are probably only the Queen or Heaven's Blades."

"Why....."

Layfon sighed at Sharnid's expression of disbelief.

"Nee-san's child, Marukuto, is the Heaven's Blade successor Rumei's child."

"..... No way?"

Felli and Nina were surprised too.

"Just the child of a second wife. The official wife doesn't have a child, so this child is still a seed."

There was no pride in Lucia's face, just sadness.

"Even so, he's the child of a Heaven's Blade successor."

"You should have said so earlier."

Layfon lowered his head at Sharnid's disapproval. Lucia smiled.

"Was it because Ruimei endangered me?"

It was dangerous for a normal person to bear the child of a Military Artist. Of course, there were many places to enable a safe delivery, otherwise the marriage between a normal person and a Military Artist would have been banned. But it was true that the probability of a miscarriage was higher.

"My previous and I parted because there's a problem with my uterus. Since I can't have child, he found someone else. Not that he's the descendant of any special lineage."

Nina and the others didn't know what to say, looking at her smiling face.

"I met Ruimei after the divorce. For some reason, I became pregnant after that. This was before the event with Layfon. Layfon's action was unexpected. Originally I couldn't give birth to a child, but giving birth to a child with a Military Artist is even more dangerous. The doctor said I might die."

Lucia's voice didn't contain any reproach, but Layfon still had his head lowered, not saying a word.

"After that, Maraku was safely delivered, but my uterus was taken out. Still, I'm healthy. Isn't that good, Layfon?"

"..... Sorry."

"Why are you apologizing?"

She hit his head again, but this time it didn't hurt.

"Anyway, isn't this an emergency?"

"Ah, yes."

Nina's train of thought returned.

"Then I'm counting on you for Felli."

"Uh, leave her to me."

Lucia accepted Nina's request and moved.

Looking at the time, it must be morning, but it was still dark in Grendan because of the cloud layers and the black smoke. Even so, a large crowd of people was outside, heading for the shelter. Layfon and the others protected Lucia as they infiltrated the people who were moving orderly for the shelter.

"Then, what do we do?" Sharnid asked.

"Ensure our escape route is safe, and also confirm the exit. Just which place would become the battlefield. Can the city still move. Though the repair isn't done, can the city move a little or that it truly can't move at all..... We must confirm all of that. Felli, can you try contacting the Student President?"

"All right."

"Are you really okay?"

"....."

Nina didn't reply to Sharnid's question. Layfon was listening to them as he pondered. Should he return to Zuellni with them and not see Leerin? He watched Lucia, who was holding Marukuto and moving in front of them. Nee-san never changed no matter what it was. The sister who controlled the kitchen managed them when Layfon was about the same age as Toby. Nee-san didn't

mention her pregnancy to anyone because she knew her adopted father would oppose it. It was by chance that Layfon knew of this. Leerin, who grew up under Lucia's influence too, would probably be like Nee-san if she had made up her mind about something.

Layfon was the same at that time. Though he was confused, he didn't tell his father. Because Nee-san's preparation had overcome him, he could only follow her strong will.

This was a familiar feeling to him as he watched Lucia led ahead of them. Though her place wasn't that close to the orphanage, her movement stimulated his memories. But.....

Not that they didn't have this weather before, with the cloud layers and black fog blocking off the sun. As long as the rain fell, the dense pollutants outside the air shield would become black fog . This was common sense. It wasn't rare that thick cloud cover would spread across the city's sky while the rain continued. But it was new for droplets of rain to hit the body. It seemed the rain was still going strong as the outside of the air shield was still dark.

Besides, what Layfon wasn't used to was walking among a crowd of refugees. He had never been part of the refugees since he started fighting. He had always been running on the battlefield. The scenery of mixing in with the refugees was in a memory from a long long time ago. Perhaps because it was this reason or of the bad weather, he didn't realize he had entered the area of his old residence. Lucia wasn't using the usual shelter this time because she had to guide Felli.

"Aunt Lucia!"

Layfon readied his murderous intent after hearing that voice.

"Who is it? Who said I'm an Aunt!"

The kids laughed as they evaded Lucia's fist.

"Call me Nee-san, okay!"

"But Toby-Ni said it."

"Yeah, Lucia feels more like a big sister than Nee-san."

"But Lucia would be angry if you called her that."

"So we can only call you Aunt."

"What conclusion is that!" Lucia said angrily and the kids laughed again.

Everyone. They were all kids that Layfon knew. Peter. Stephen. William. Holland. The children of the orphanage. Layfon's siblings , the next generation after Toby and the other children.

Nina, Felli and Sharnid, having noticed the kids later than Layfon, were keeping a little distance from Lucia, observing her. They didn't know where Layfon was hiding. Layfon watched the faces of his siblings. Nostalgia and pain rushed up to him.

"Lucia? Why are you here?"

Romina arrived just a little bit later than the kids. She was slightly older than Lucia. She was of Lucia's generation and had also looked after Layfon.

"Romina, now that you're the head of the orphanage, you should teach these kids properly."

"Really. Why are they all boys. Aren't there kids like Leerin and Rainetta..... Geez, stop fooling around!"

"Girls have always been managing our orphanage."

Anger, laughter, clouting kids' heads. After that, everyone joined the crowd of refugees. Layfon followed behind so they wouldn't discover him.

"Speaking of which, why are you here, Lucia? If you left home, you should be heading to another shelter?"

"Well, something's come up."

"Something?"

"Compared to that, I don't see Toby and the others? What happened?"

Romina sighed with her palm supporting her slightly chubby face.

"It's not just today."

The two of them watched the still honest kids. But the kids seemed to be considering another prank. They all smiled, looking at Romina and then turning their faces away.

Really. Romina sighed again.

"As I thought, you should be the orphanage head. You were also the manager in our generation."

But Lucia let the conversation end with a bitter smile. Perhaps Romina had mentioned that a number of times. She didn't mention Maruku. They must have talked over that too.

"But that can't be helped. I've my own problem here. Speaking of which, where's father?"

Romina looked at the baby's sleeping face, her expression softening. "I'm not sure too. His disciples said he left without saying anything."

"That's rare."

"Yes. Don't know what to do with this group of problematic kids without father and Toby."

"You'll get used to it one day."

Romina sighed many more times in response to Lucia's comforting words.

Judging from the conversation, the two of them were feeling more of the passing of time than the nostalgia of the past. Layfon

had heard that Derek had passed the Head of the orphanage position to someone while Layfon was on his way to Zuellni, but he didn't know that person was Romina. Toby and the others would have to manage the kids without Layfon and Leerin, and this wasn't possible, so Romina was given the position, and she accepted it. Forget Rainetta for now. What was Toby's reaction back then? Time continued to flow. It had been flowing even though it hadn't been a year yet. The absence of Layfon and Leerin had become matter of fact in the orphanage.

This was for sure. There were siblings of Layfon and Leerin's age when Lucia and the other older siblings left. But these siblings either became adopted or left to become apprentices. The only ones left were the two of them, so they had to manage the younger siblings. Changes happened in life, and people would react accordingly. Layfon and the others did the same, and so did Toby and his generation.

What Layfon felt shocked about was that he didn't get to see them grow.

Or maybe he was surprised he was thinking of this.

"It hasn't been all that long but we're coming across filth monsters again?"

"We've been through that before."

"Yes, but that event a few days past was different from others."

Romina's gaze moved away from her younger sister to beyond the crowd, fixing at the outside of the city. Zuellni wasn't that clear because of the black fog, but one could see the city's outline. The artificial light of the Academy City was shining brightly, seeming to emphasize its existence.

"Layfon's living over there, right? Toby and the rest fought yesterday because of that."

Layfon felt the tension tighten in his chest at hearing his own name.

"Toby?"

"Yes. Peter and the others have suffered from the impact but they don't hate Layfon like Toby and the rest. Toby must think differently about him."

Lucia's words told Layfon that the journalists from the magazine didn't point the finger at Layfon. Rather, they had turned their fury to the underground matches, but Toby and the others wouldn't be able to change their mind so easily. They must still be mad at him.

Romina should have continued saying something after Lucia's words..... That should be it.

But the noise of a huge explosion smothered her voice.

And then the city started to shake. People wailed after the noise. The originally orderly crowd collapsed into chaos because of the

shaking. Some people fell because of panic, some tried to escape first. Chaos ensued.

Layfon let go of his murderous intent and tried to protect Romina and the others from the crowd, allowing the crowd to flow past him.

"Strange....."

He felt somebody's gaze piercing his back. But he couldn't stop his action even with that feeling. Nina, Sharnid and Felli came to help him.

It was Holland who spoke the words. Layfon could distinguish his sibling's voice even through the commotion.

"Layfon..... Nii.....?"

Layfon's heart hurt as if it were being torn piece by piece.

But the chaos in Grendan was just beginning.

Looking at the Heaven's Blade successors gathering once again in the palace, Alsheyra spoke.

"Welcome to hell."

Kalvan's expression was pained, but Alsheyra didn't seem to care.

"Okay, this isn't time for us to laze around. Delbone, how's the situation?"

(Yes. The target is 30 kilometers east of Grendan. The number is increasing because our opponents cannot immediately attack here. That location is around 200 meters above Grendan. They're continuing to appear. The number is increasing exponentially because their number is swelling in this world and in the other dimension. It shouldn't take them long to exceed Grendan's surface area.)

"Just what are you saying?" Reverse asked, his face frightened.

Exceed Grendan's surface area. Even the Heaven's Blades didn't immediately comprehend her words, but Alsheyra didn't seem to mind.

"Of course she means the enemies," she replied matter-of-factly. "The plan is..... But then again, I don't have one. All members are to fight on the outer edge. It doesn't matter if the city sustains some damage, but you have to use all your strength otherwise you may be destroyed. More deaths would result if you restrain yourself."

(Because of that person's help, it couldn't come through the air shield the last time. But I don't know how it would turn out this

time with the number increasing like this. Also, our opponent's body is already more than the surface area of this city. Judging by its strength, it is quite flexible. I'm afraid it may try to encircle the entire city, so Heaven's Blade successors, please don't gather in one point."

"That's the situation. Other than Kanaris' group, everyone else spread around the city. Tigris and Barmelin stay behind to support the others. Savaris that idiot can't participate because he's injured. Kalvan, Lintence, Ruimei, Troyatte, Cauntia, Reverse. You six form a hexagon on the front line. Understood?"

"..... I'm very sorry, but this intelligence about the enemy is unbelievable."

Kalvan's words must represent all Heaven's Blades' feeling, but Alsheyra didn't explain further. She knew her explanation would turn their understanding of filth monsters upside down. The attack of the giants on Zuellni a few days ago was really strange. Their individual forms were of average size. As for the larvae moving together, that wasn't too surprising because larvae tended to move as a group. This must be what the Heaven's Blades were thinking.

But it was different this time. These were individual filth monsters according to Delbone's intelligence. They didn't usually move together.

The biggest problem was the size of the enemy.

Could such thing really exist? Even the Heaven's Blade successors couldn't imagine it.

"Rather than hearing of it, isn't it clearer to see it with your own eyes? That would be the fastest way," Alsheyra answered Kalvan succinctly. "Then, do you understand what you've to do? Then move. The Heaven's Blades that I gave you, the stupid yet huge strength, reveal it all to me here and now. What are you waiting for if you don't use it now?"

Alsheyra sent out all the Heaven's Blade successors as if she was chasing them away. Delbone was in charge of informing the Heaven's Blades of the detailed locations. The Heaven's Blades obeyed and left the palace, leaving only Lintence behind.

Only Lintence's expression showed no changes from beginning to end. Of course, he had been waiting for such a day. It was not possible for him to feel uneasy. On the other hand, he may have smiled like a beast meeting its prey, but he didn't do that. For Delbone who held some insider information, the cowardly Reverse , and the Heaven's Blade successors who viewed your average battle as a stroll, even their hearts were swayed in today's situation , but Lintence kept his calm.

This wasn't strange because he was the most reliable.

"Geez, it isn't necessarily a good thing to be too strong," Alsheyra sighed, considering the role she played in this battle.

(Speaking of which, the girl with the Haikizoku has escaped. Is this all right?)

"Ah, isn't the Ronsmier family guarding her?"

(Several people lost her trail, and a number of them had gone missing. Something must have happened in a place where my Psychokinesis can't reach.)

"Another unusual event."

There was no place in Grendan where Delbone's Psychokinesis couldn't reach. This meant that place must be very unusual.

(Are you not interested in the information you hold so far? Is that girl useless just by counting her fighting strength?)

"Doesn't Zuellni need her power to protect her? That girl's eyes seem to say she's the symbol of justice. She also seems to be involved in many things, though we don't know how she'd act."

(I feel from Your Majesty that you're trying to tell her something .)

"Is that so? I don't seem to have told her to come along if she wanted to hear the truth."

(Is that right?)

"Yes. Besides, I don't have anything to tell her. If it's her, shouldn't that man be the one to tell her?"

Alsheyra was thinking of the red haired man that she met in Zuellni. The Military Artist with a beast's mask. The emboldened man who invaded Leerin's room. He was the man who survived in a world that Alsheyra didn't want to see. She gave such advice to Nina so that Nina could see a clearer reason to her own action.

Perhaps she would understand more by coming to Grendan. That was it only. Alsheyra said those words by instinct when she saw that girl.

Originally she didn't pay Nina that much attention, but that changed because of Kanaris' intense demand and Savaris' interest in her. In addition, one of the other reasons to take care of the previous King's will.

The previous King of Grendan thought the Haikizoku's strength was necessary, so he sent out the Salinvan Mercenary Gang. That was probably because he hadn't gathered all the Heaven's Blades yet, hence he wanted to replace them with the Haikizoku's strength.

The point of the necessity of the Haikizoku and its strengthened Military Artist wasn't important to Alsheyra. It wouldn't be unreasonable to gather strength by using a Haikizoku's strength or employing Kei accelerating drug and giving that person the Heaven's Blade since not all twelve Heaven's Blade successors had been assembled. But for some reason, Alsheyra didn't like this method.

The previous King was a Military Artist but he wasn't that great . He was even weaker than the Heaven's Blade successors. This implied their ancestor Airen, the Military Artist, his DNA had spread thinner. The previous King's thought was totally opposite Alsheyra's had to have been because of that.

The strength of a Haikizoku was not essential. Even if its hatred could strengthen a Military Artist, it was just an overlap of

misfortune and chance. Then, the Haikizoku was just something on a rampage? Perhaps this wasn't just it as she looked at Grendan, but this bore no relationship with her. And it wasn't the most important problem now. The awakened Saya also hadn't mentioned anything about it.

(As I thought, I've met that fellow somewhere before.)

Delbone was bothered by that red haired man. She felt an unsteady power behind that man. He wasn't a normal Military Artist.

Still, Alsheyra didn't care.

"How about you release the seal placed on your memory?"

(Perhaps that might be something good, but it is no longer suitable for a body in my old age to peek into the alley of Asura.)

"Then forget that thing."

Having decided on what she needed to do, it wasn't necessary to search deeper into the unrelated event.

"Perhaps Grendan knows something. That fellow must also have with him a Haikizoku."

(Since Your Majesty feels there's no need to look deeper into his issue, I don't need to worry about it too, but.....)

"But?"

(..... Why do you care naught for the things around you?)

Alsheyra smiled bitterly at the sudden question.

Because hers was a fated answer.

"Because I already know what I must do. Besides, I also know I'm not omnipotent."

She stood up. She wouldn't simply wait for everything to end this time. Even though she was a Queen with the power that exceeded everything, she must have the same mental preparation for it. Several Heaven's Blade successors still didn't believe her. The battle in Zuellni a few days ago was very unusual, but even though they agreed it wasn't normal, this didn't mean they'd easily believe her words. The Heaven's Blades saw those things in Zuellni with their own eyes. Their number was numerous and they were powerful. They were neither larvae nor male filth monsters, but all of them held the same appearance just like the larvae. The place they appeared from was also from the sky. This was truly unusual.

But the Heaven's Blades saw the enemies and entered the fight.

The other Heaven's Blades who were outside the city also saw the enemies.

Perhaps this still wasn't enough to change the Heaven's Blades' thinking about the filth monsters. They would speculate on the current situation based on their personal experience of that time. Perhaps some of them would also hold a wrong understanding.

The number of enemies was large. It was a high possibility that even Delbone's Psychokinesis couldn't truly grasp hold of the enemy's number. Some of the Heaven's Blades thought so, and in fact, Kalvan had given voice to this thought but Kanaris had scolded him angrily with the reason "Her Majesty would never lie. "

But even though Kanaris had been governing in place of the Queen, even though in her flowed the blood of the three royal families, even though she held some inside information, she still couldn't hide the distrust in her.

Alsheyra commented that their fights were like strolls. True. The battles of Heaven's Blades weren't difficult as long as it wasn't a fight against an aged phase filth monster with a name. To say it from another perspective, it could be misfortune. Not that the Heaven's Blades had made the mistake of underestimating their enemies in the first place, but they couldn't feel the sense of victory and joy of defeating an enemy using all of their strength.

How should the Heaven's Blades think in this current situation.. .....

"..... Uh?"

The movements of the Heaven's Blades finished in a flash. Kalvan was already watching the outside of the city when the Queen was still conversing with Delbone.

He held the Heaven's Blade in its restored form. The rain had completely halted. Black fog still lingered around the air shield

whose sole purpose was to remove the pollutants. However, the fog was thinner in the outer edge area because the rainfall was less . The darkness on the other side of the fog implied clouds still covered this city, blocking off the sun.

But Kalvan felt the unnaturalness of the cloud layers.

From where..... A feeling of uneasiness that was extremely hard to explain. He didn't think this darkness was normal. He still couldn't see the end of the darkness with his internal Kei strengthened vision. Something made him feel uncomfortable but he didn't know what it was.

"Delbone, what is the distance between us and the enemies?"

It wasn't his personality not to get to the bottom of his doubt. Perhaps this was boosted by the fact that he was in the battlefield. He was second to Delbone and Lintence in terms of battle experience in Grendan. And for someone like him, he had noticed something.

(You should say you're already seeing it.)

Delbone's voice was like a girl playing a prank.

But Kalvan agreed with her words.

"Delbone, please notify everyone," Kalvan said as he released all of his Kei. Golden light exuded from his body.

External Kei variation – Armed Sword.

Kei that had half turned into a real substance twisted itself up the entire length of Kalvan's body as he shouted loud voice, "All hands, ready for battle. Don't get confused. Fight with all your strength!"

His Kei-infused voice echoed in the sky like thunder, making the air shake. The vibration reached the other side of the air shield and dispersed the surrounding dark fog.

Still, the opposite side was a sea of darkness, but Kalvan already understood what he was seeing.

Nothing could be seen through the gaps in between cloud layers. A deserted field should lay open in front of what was blocking his vision. One could put it more accurately that there were no gaps in between cloud layers. The time right now was morning, but no sunlight broke through the clouds. This meant the thing in Grendan's sky was big enough to block off all the sunlight. This thing was right before Kalvan.

Kalvan's speculation was spot on.

What lay before him was like a wall.

But it wasn't a real wall. It was a part of a living creature. One part of the monster that was covering the entirety of Grendan was before him. And impossible, stirring movements could be seen across the monster's skin.

(So this is hell.)

Kalvan had never seen so huge a filth monster even though he had fought countless times. Shock stayed in his throat. Words he wanted to give voice too were buried in his heart.

Voiceless.

This monster was almost near enough to touch the air shield but it had yet to make a noise, otherwise Kalvan could have noticed its existence much earlier rather than only feeling uncomfortable.

This colossal body headed for Grendan without making a noise. One could say it was unusual out of all unusual events.

Kalvan lifted the Heaven's Blade. It was a huge longsword. The golden Kei weaving his body also wrapped itself around the sword. The area of gold continued to expand in the sky.

Expand.

Expand.

Expand.

Golden Kei expanded its territory in the sky. The entire world was painted gold. The light of gold dispelled the darkness and gradually revealed the shape of the monster.

One couldn't see the entire monster no matter how wide one's vision was. Kalvan's vision was filled with the monster's skin. He stretched his neck and still couldn't see the end of that skin.

Plus the movements on the skin.

It felt like the internal organs of a monster were in front of the entire city of Grendan.

Kalvan felt the stirring of strong Kei from different spots on the outer edge. The Heaven's Blade successors were each entering battle mode. Just Kalvan's Kei was enough to make the city wail.

"Humph," Kalvan made the noise as he felt his Kei and the Kei of other Heaven's Blades.

How long had it been since he could fight with all his might? No. Had he been fighting with all his strength before?

Perhaps this had occurred to him when he was young. A new fighter who had yet to obtain the Heaven's Blade. Perhaps he had once fought with all of his strength, relying only on the strength of his wrist and Kei when he was new to the keys of techniques and to the methods of how to employ his power. But an average opponent could no longer withstand the pressure of his Kei when he held onto a certain fighting technique. He had never used all of his strength since that time. He wasn't dissatisfied with the Heaven's Blade, but the problems he came across after that had to do with the tolerance of fighting suits used outside the city and the considerations placed on the city's safety when he was in a battle.

But now?

In this battlefield right now, in this impending hell?

This wasn't the time to ponder. The city would certainly face destruction if he didn't defeat this monster. He couldn't defeat it if

he didn't use all his strength. Did this feeling come because of the battle experience he had accumulated or that he felt frightened of this horror?

The golden territory surrounded one part of the outer-edge, Kalvan's territory. Golden Kei stretched like something flexible, as sharp points emerged along different spots of the golden Kei. An ancient animal with Kalvan as the center was born.

"Then, let me see how much I can use my sword technique!" he said.

The monster broke through the air shield almost at the same time and attacked.

The air shield was torn asunder. This was what Kanaris saw. The truth wasn't like that though. The air shield was almost invisible to the naked eye. What Kanaris saw was the movement of the surrounding dark fog. The dark fog flowed into Grendan like a ball being burst from the inside. However, the truth was different. The pollutants didn't flow in. Still, it wasn't that urgent even if the pollutants flowed inside the city.

What she could see now was very intense, and it was invading the city.

It looked like the internal organs were suddenly splitting themselves up from a gigantic body into numerous individual forms. The enemy was using this strategy probably because it couldn't enter the air shield with its gargantuan body. Otherwise,

even the Heaven's Blades couldn't block off the attack if the monster was to press down on the city with its whole body.

But Kanaris hadn't thought of this explanation. Focused on the battle in front of her, she only reacted accordingly.

This time she wasn't wearing luxurious clothing. The clothes she wore before was for when she governed Grendan in the Queen's steed. She had always been wearing the current clothes underneath her luxurious clothing. The tightly-fitted fighting suit, the long sleeves stopping short of her elbows and the length of the pants stopping short of her knees were all designed to minimize interference with her movements.

In her hand was a restored Heaven's Blade in the form of a thin blade.

"Ahah, I was such a fool," she said to the sky, feeling the tension she had never felt before as countless enemies splitting from the monster's body headed for Grendan.

"I actually doubted Her Majesty's words."

She lifted the sword to the level of her chest. Her action was like the opening pose of a dance. One could see the slight tension floating around her.

Fu..... Kanaris swung the sword horizontally.

The dance began.

"Please forgive me, Your Majesty," she said and continued to swung the sword in her hand. The monsters crossing the sky above her..... She cut them down one by one, tearing apart their bodies with the Kei hidden in the sword's paths.

She hadn't moved from her spot as she danced with the sword, swinging it around her body, making it leaping in the sky like she was dancing. The path of the sword's dance shattered the monsters in the distant sky.

A piece of music supported her dance.

Countless bodies split out from the gigantic monster stirring in the sky. It wasn't possible for the monster not to make a noise in under this intense battle even though it reached Grendan noiselessly.

Because the Kei of the Heaven's Blade successors were vibrating .

And the vibrations all became the music and rhyme of Kanaris' dance.

Occurrence, clash, swallowed, covering, rebirth, biting, friction, fading, and it all happened again. Kanaris danced with the speedy, repeated music. The technique of the music or the beauty of art didn't exist. The chaotic noise was cut apart and reborn because of Kanaris' sword. It was once again dragged into her sword path and torn asunder.

Her sword continued to dance, and each new individual form tearing from the huge body continued to break apart.

The individual form looked similar to the average larva. A rock-solid shell covered the huge body. Long and thick legs grew from the monster. The lower jaw formed the head that aligned with his body in a straight line. The not-too sharp teeth lined the jaw, their sole purpose to crush the enemy.

But this would only happen after they managed to land.

The original..... The original body that was outside the air shield and covering Grendan like a huge intestine was shooting out one copy after another. The legs were hidden underneath the shell, the body was curled into a ball, and they were being shot out like teardrops.

Countless. In huge numbers.

This could be seen as three combined attacks consisting of shooting out, entering, and creating chaos from all directions except the ground. And Kanaris kept dancing in it.

A flash of the sword. The enemy shattered into 100 billion pieces, and there was almost no gap in between the first and the next swing of the blade. The speed of Kanaris' dance had already exceeded a speed that words could describe. The average citizen would fail to see anything special from this. Even a normal Military Artist would not be able to see anything. A dance along

with the sound of battle aimed at the living bullets shooting into the entire city. Kanaris' dance wasn't that strange an occurrence compared to this.

She continued to dance in one spot. She had never moved from it.

No, she couldn't move away as long as she danced. The area of her movement was within half to ten centimeters. She never stepped across this area. Not even by one step.

But the path depicted in her dance was cutting down all the enemies from one side of her area to the other, drawing out a broken line of light.

Internal and external Kei variation - Resounding Melody.

Sound filled her surroundings..... Vibration and Kanaris' dancing became one. Her dance drew it on, controlling it. The huge Kei exuding from the Heaven's Blade filled the surroundings to become one with the vibration, and it had emerged as the victor.

The action of swinging a sword originally held no meaning. The cut paths didn't come from the sword. Kanaris' sword was acting like a baton, and Kanaris was the conductor of a band. Wherever her baton pointed as she swung the slender sword, destruction occurred.

"..... So, I, Kanaris, will not fail Your Majesty's expectation. I'll continue to eliminate them, so please watch me."

Accompanying the sound of Kanaris' sword path were numerous forms splitting apart from the huge body..... the living bullets burst and fell one by one.

The intense scenery existed here too.

Standing still here was a small piece of metal. Unbelievably heavy armor wrapped around the tiny existence of a Military Artist in Grendan. The multi-layer armor formed by the Dite wrapped around his tiny body. He was like the one who appears in a series or a fairy tale, the one who rides a horse, appearing in a movie with spear and shield upraised..... Like a knight.

There existed a way to fight like a knight though there was no real knight in Grendan. Wrapped from head to toe with heavy fighting suit, lifting a knight's spear and piercing the filth monster's body as a group, this fighting method was built on being prepared to make sacrifices. This method was not appropriate for Grendan who had to fight against filth monsters more frequently than other cities. Hence, this method was not popular. However, it did exist.

But for the tiny body who looked like a boy in his teens, no matter how you looked at him he was not a knight. He couldn't possibly be a knight. He only held a shield. A defensive tool. He didn't have a weapon. All he held was only a shield. A huge shield that shielded his entire body.

He only focused on defense. He put so much emphasis on it that he didn't even hold a weapon..... No. The shield itself could

act as a blunt weapon. Still, he placed too much importance on defensive equipment. A majority of Military Artists would probably mock him as a coward and gaze at him with unreserved contempt. But they didn't do so.

Holding a shield, he was standing at the appointed place. At the place closest the outer edge of the city as he gazed at the gigantic monster nearing the city with upraised head. The eyes behind the mask showed no signs of fear as he faced the enormous monster and its horrifying movements. His fear didn't drag out into the hour of battle even though he was scared of it with his face turning green, even though his body shook when he heard the Queen said "hell".

The timid hero.

This was how people who knew him complimented him. Because he was a coward, he possessed strength and courage that was stronger than anyone else as he stood ready to face battle. No matter how many enemies stood before him, he held a mental strength that was stronger than anyone as long as he overcame his timidness.

He was the Heaven's Blade successor Reverse Ilginas Elmen. No enemy existed who dared to stand in front of him.

It held true even now.

Kalvan's shout pierced the outer edge through the flakes.

"..... Tia."

The event transpiring before the other Heaven's Blades was also happening here as he made a noise behind his mask.

The intestine-like skin of the massive monster continued to split . The bullets of living creatures shot out like a torrential rain past the air shield to attack the city.

As usual, Reverse's eyes seemed to be closed, but his slit-like eyes didn't miss the scenery before him. He also didn't seem to want to escape.

He lifted the shield before him and released the Kei in his body.

Internal and external Kei variation – Kongoukei Barrier.

This was the matured form of Kongoukei that Layfon stole from Reverse and later taught Nina. The outer edge where Reverse stood formed a defensive line around the city, a barrier of Kei.

Reverse stared ahead of him. His determined gaze stared at the colossal monster outside the city, stared at the bullets of creatures shooting out from its body. He could capture them with his senses even if his eyes couldn't catch them. Either way, he was a defender . He focused all of his talents on the defensive. He kept training himself until he reached this state. And the person whom he protected also arrived at a state entirely opposite his.

"Ah, I know, Reverse."

The voice sounded behind him, carrying with it a sense of drunkenness.

Different from Reverse, it belonged to a tall female. Her arms and legs were shockingly long. Her open fighting suit revealed a huge injury across her chest. There was also another big wound drawing from her forehead to her neck. Long hair the same color as her skin drifted in the wind. She was gazing at Reverse with proud and infatuated eyes.

The Green Dragon crescent moon sabre was resting on her shoulder.

Cauntia Valmon Falnes.

The person who had reached a state totally opposite her partner's had focused on her attention on offense. She slashed down a path diagonally as she lifted the sabre.

External Kei variation – Ravenous Wolf's Charge.

Reverse's defensive wall blocked off all the bullets of life creatures in his area. Many of them died when they touched the wall. But their comrades, shot over in the next wave were using them as cushions, so many managed to survive. The number of surviving bullets increased following the rise of number of corpses on the wall.

The external Kei infused in Cauntia's Green Dragon crescent moon saber became a starving wolf's claw in the air, wiping away the remains in the outer edge and the bullets that managed to survive. The path of her saber cut away the monsters. External Kei turned them into powder and the heat of the Kei burnt them into coal. The chain of damage and destruction showed no signs of

abating. The move was like a pack of starving wolves being released. The pack charged their prey, full of destructiveness.

The light of annihilation dispersed like foam and repelled all its enemies.

The Ravenous Wolf's Charge was affecting the original body outside the air shield too. Long lashes of injuries were crafted into the skin of the huge body. The body shook. Its vibrations spread through the air shield and a sound of pain echoed throughout the city.

The shooting of bullets halted but not the injury. It pierced straight through the huge body until one could see the sun on the other side. The power of that move was this strong.

"..... It could have been better if I could use this outside the city."

Reverse didn't reveal a bitter smile at the dissatisfied Cauntia. His tense expression would not loosen up as long as he still in a battle. He was afraid that his timid courage that was suppressing his cowardice would disappear like fog if he were to loosen up.

"If you were to use it outside, you'd die, Cauntia."

He had to say this. Cauntia dying was scarier than himself dying.

In reality, the leather-like clothes she wore as she stood behind Reverse were in tatters. The not so rounded breasts were also revealed. The rebounding force of her move had damaged her clothes. Her clothes could only withstand ten shockwaves when

she fought outside the city. And that was when she wasn't using her full strength. Cauntia had said she wouldn't have let that aged phase filth monster escape if she were to use the move she just executed.

"But I don't like it when I can't catch my prey."

It was hard to imagine she was fighting in this battle as he recalled her dissatisfied expression in the past. He couldn't help but smile bitterly in the end. Her expression hadn't changed. Alarm filled his eyes under the mask as he watched the body of the huge monster.

"It hasn't ended," he said.

"I know."

Cauntia understood her lover's personality very well, so she didn't get angry at him. She also wasn't surprised at the event unfolding before her.

The injury inflicted by Ravenous Wolf's Charge healed in a split second. It wasn't strange that this monster's recovering ability was greater than a filth monster in its aged phase. This was predictable since the monster was able to cover the entire city.

"Then let's give it everything we have, just like before."

Cauntia smiled. Her smile, for someone who was performing destructive acts, was so beautiful.

But Reverse wasn't looking at her. His gaze was always glued to the place ahead of him in order to protect the woman he loved behind him.

In the sky.

"It seems this isn't the time to stay in the back and give support.
"

External Kei variation – Meandering Haze.

Tigris said as he released the shot. The bronze bowstring sliced the air and gave off a crisp sound. A crisp and fresh sound of power that rose above the battlefield filled with chaos, bedlam and madness. The released arrow was a shot of condensed external Kei . It turned into numerous new arrows as it was released from the bow. The shots dispersed like shining water droplets, and they became a torrent of rain. Their trajectory wasn't straight. They ignored the principle of nature and changed direction after traveling for some distance. Like animals fallen into water, they pierced through the bullets attempting to land, shattered them and went to hunt down the next prey until they exhausted their energy .

A new Meandering Haze shot out before the rain of arrows disappeared. Dots painted the sky of Grendan.

He had been called an old man since he was young. He stood rooted to the spot just like his name as he continued to release his arrows.

Behind him.

"So annoying. Annoying. Annoying."

Barmelin repeated while she pulled the trigger. She held two cannons. The body of each cannon had two round barrels aligned side by side. The two barrels spun every time a bullet shot out. Not many Military Artists preferred this weapon but some liked it. But the city government would hate him for the enormous artillery bill if he were to use real bullets. In addition, Kei bullets would tip the balance between the Military Artist's amount of Kei and the speed the bullet was shot out. Hence some Military Artists disliked it. These reasons explained why it was rare to see this weapon.

Still, Barmelin was using two such weapons and shooting out Kei bullets. This point alone was enough to demonstrate her unusual amount of Kei. Also, this weapon needed something to help brace its body because of its weight. For example, using straps and then holding it with two hands. But Barmelin was holding one in each hand without any trouble. This meant her internally Kei-strengthened muscles were quite something.

Four thousand bullets every minute. Two hands equaled eight thousand bullets. This number of Kei bullets flew through Grendan's sky. They formed a screen in the sky and also looked

like an intense stream. The monsters passing through the air shield shattered into pieces when they contacted the screen or the stream.

"Really, this isn't a speed an old man like me can catch up to," Tigris sighed as he kept shooting. There was no change to his speed.

"Hurry up and retire, you dead old man."

"Is this respect for the elderly?"

"You're so noisy. If you want me to be like that then become someone that is worthy of respect before you say it."

"Hahaha, that's true."

Tigris laughed joyously and kept shooting arrows. Barmelin kept pulling the triggers, her expression dissatisfied.

The screen of Kei bullets weaved by two Heaven's Blade successors heartlessly obliterated the bullets of creatures falling from the sky. They weren't giving them any chance.

"..... So troublesome."

The feeling of dissatisfaction didn't disappear in Barmelin's body.

"So annoying. I should just get rid of it with one shot."

She glanced at the restored Dite under her foot.

That was her Heaven's Blade. A right amount of Kei was required in terms of using guns. Otherwise, one couldn't even shoot with a gun. Although her Heaven's Blade had a setting that would allow her to adjust the level of Kei, this wasn't the time to use it recklessly. This was also one aspect of the gun. It was different from Tigris' bow, which allowed him to change the amount of Kei at will. To put it clearly, a gun was just a device used to release a certain amount of Kei as a bullet.

"Bear with it a while longer," Tigris said with a sour smile. "It won't be too late to use that later. There's always an order to doing things."

Of course, the Heaven's Blade successors' ability to minimize the damages the city sustained in this unusual situation was one type of "unusual".

"As I said, right now, we have to bear it."

"Humph."

Barmelin turned her gaze to the stream of Kei bullets again.

Looking at the downpour of Kei bullets that showed no signs of stopping.

Very little damage meant the city was still harmed even though the damages were minimized.

"How's the situation?"

(About the reception to the attack, the current rate of destruction is 99.9999999..... almost close to 100.)

"That isn't 100%."

Alsheyra looked out the window to the battlefield after listening to Delbone's report. The strength of the Heaven's Blades that could almost strike through all the monsters was worthy of compliment. But this wasn't a 100% success, meaning a very small number had landed in Grendan and continued to move. Even a small number wasn't a number to be neglected in light of the total.

(This number is still controllable because Military Artists have been arranged on the third defensive line.)

"They would be useless if they can't even do that much."

But the problem was how much longer would this state last?

In this bizarre situation, she couldn't not worry about the mental state of the Heaven's Blade successors who enjoyed battle. It was also problematic of how long other Military Artists could sustain themselves mentally. The pressure of the mind was heavier than that on the flesh. It wasn't possible to stay sane for long in this battle.

"Let's hope it won't drag out for too long."

(But we'll be troubled if Your Majesty used all of your strength.)

"I know," she said as if she had eaten something bitter. "Are you trying to say that the timing is the key?"

(If Your Majesty's strike a few days ago was 10%, then a strike at full power would create a rebounding force large enough to destroy half of the palace. It might cause huge damage to the ground under the worst circumstance. Though the palace had been rebuilt to cushion the impact, do you think the palace could contain all the damages? Please give it some consideration.)

"I hate being too strong."

Delbone laughed at her words.

(It's very important for wait for the timing right now. Allow the Heaven's Blades to make that chance. Make that monster show its weakness. It is necessary to wait till then.)

"It'd be good if it really has a weak point."

"..... It does have a weak point."

The person who replied was Saya. The girl of moonlight had been standing behind with Leerin as she watched the battle rage outside the window with little emotion.

"Saya?"

"That's probably Nano Celluloid Interface M Durin."

"What a name."

"It was a weapon that Ignasis used to destroy the world before it became Ignasis' subordinate. It can turn the atoms of the Aurora

Field into energy and increase it endlessly in Zero Territory. It may be in a half rampage state."

"Atoms of the Aurora Field?"

"Oh, the ancestor of the filth monsters. That I do know. What next?"

"Nano Celluloid is a group weapon made up of many individual forms. The core that controls everything is inside the body. It isn't possible for it to attack in large scale without a core controlling the organization."

"That's true. There is a weak point, but even you don't know its location, right?"

"No."

"I see," Alsheyra said and finally sensed Leerin spacing out.

"What is it?"

"..... Nothing. What is it?"

Leerin must be the one most uncomfortable about the current battle. She was not used to a battle no matter how prepared she was mentally. She would definitely feel unsettled with a battle raging before her.

"It's all right."

So Alsheyra showed a carefree smile.

"Seems like it isn't the expected final battle."

"Is that so.....? But why....."

"Because it's not Lævateinn. Besides, the moon is not falling," Saya replied.

"Lævateinn?"

"Nano Celluloid Interface 1 Lævateinn. He is the original of the Nano Celluloids and the filth monsters. An existence up a level of Durin who is attacking this city."

"Then is he like a king?"

"It's more like a queen from its shape."

"Ara, the same as me."

"The situation on the moon seems dangerous judging by the fact that Durin has successfully escaped. But Lævateinn has yet to appear, and so Ignasis probably hasn't been released, or we can say it hasn't reached that stage yet. Protecting Ignasis is always her first priority."

Alsheyra couldn't tell from Leerin's expression if she understood Saya's explanation or not. But her unsettled face was facing the window.

Ah. Yes.

Alsheyra also turned her gaze out the window as if she had thought of something. Even if she was to strengthen her vision, she still couldn't see it.

It was on the other side of the air shield.

Zuellni.

(That guy shouldn't have the time to spare to attack the other side.)

But this wasn't the only thing Leerin was worrying about. Of course, she was worried about Zuellni, but she was even more worried about the person in it.

Layfon.

Alsheyra had asked Delbone about him, but she had not told Leerin that Layfon had come to Grendan. Delbone may have thought that Leerin already knew or she thought it wasn't something she herself should say.

(Is this really all right?)

Delbone was asking about Layfon's punishment. Was it really all right not to retract the order exiling him?

Alsheyra would reinstate his Heaven's Blade title if Leerin asked for it now. Leerin's ability was essential even though they didn't know how much of it was needed. But she believed the blood of Grendan's royalty had become purer as evident in the births of Leerin and Alsheyra, the existences that were one step

away from perfection. Hence Leerin's blood was needed to make this plan come into fruition.

Besides, this incidence, the day that was fated to arrive, today's incidence that had been predicted, this meant the day to use Leerin's eye would come sooner or later, and so she was the most important person in Grendan. Alsheyra would not casually deny Leerin's wish.

But Leerin would not ask for it. She had already said so in Zuellni and in the Inner Court of Grendan. She didn't want to drag Layfon in. She didn't wish to involve him in this hell.

To Alsheyra, there was no need for Layfon to become a Heaven's Blade successor since he had been exiled from Grendan. Alsheyra had been gathering the Heaven's Blades since she became Queen.

This meant everything was fated. Things didn't happen by chance. Alsheyra understood this to be her personal explanation but she felt the person to become a Heaven's Blade successor must be fated to do so. So for Layfon who was chosen by a Heaven's Blade and had to let go of it, the fate of becoming a Heaven's Blade successor was not to be his.

The same reason explained the impossibility of making a Military Artist hold the Heaven's Blade through the strength of a Haikizoku and Kei accelerating drugs. These acts would only forcibly twist fate. They were meaningless acts that would create unfortunate consequences. It was better not to do it in the first place than to create the uneasiness.

"....."

She looked at the side of Leerin's face.

But it wasn't that bad to allow Layfon to come back. As long as he had his personality of leaving the reason of a fight to others, as long as he still cared about Leerin, then Leerin's reason to fight would become his reason to fight. In a way, Layfon would once more return to the road of fate.

(Never mind. Things will work out somehow.)

As expected, Alsheyra's thinking wouldn't change. If Layfon was fated to become a Heaven's Blade successor then he would hold a Heaven's Blade even if she didn't do anything. Right now, they had to focus on the thing happening before them.

What would that guy do.....

What he would do probably wouldn't be related to the battle now.

"Nii-san?" the brothers and sisters said behind him.

The pain in Layfon's heart wasn't physical but it was enough to make him breathless. Still, this wasn't time for the pain to drag him down. The city was shaking because of the attack. Layfon knew this was caused by the Heaven's Blade successors on the outer edge of the city.

".....All of them?"

The waves of Kei linking like one line on the outer edge was telling Layfon of this fact. On top of this were the two waves of huge Kei rolling from the center of the city, making it the Kei of nine people altogether. Nine people except Delbone and Savaris. No one could possess so much Kei other than Heaven's Blades.

The Heaven's Blades had not entered battle together when Layfon was still in Grendan. Usually only one Heaven's Blade was needed in battle excluding Delbone, who was constantly searching through Psychokinesis. The exception was the fight with the filth monster with a name – Behemoth. But even that battle didn't need all Heaven's Blade successors.

But Layfon didn't have time spared to feel shocked.

He immediately understood through his sight why the Kei of the Heaven's Blade successors were covering the entire city.

He was a little later than usual in detecting the situation because the people he was familiar with had attracted his attention with their conversation. And he had concentrated on protecting them from the refugees around them. But then even others noticed it by this stage.

"..... Hey, what's that?"

Layfon looked at the sky and finally understood what it was that could counter the huge Kei of the Heaven's Blades. The alarm made his skin prick. His body moved stiffly. He used his body to protect the siblings behind him.

The enemy was in the sky.

It was morning now but the sky was still dark, and it suddenly split. Bubbles surfaced one after another like boiling water, and then they split apart..... this happened at the same time in numerous places, and then a large number of things fell from the sky.

A huge number of Kei bullets ripped the sky apart in a speed faster than people could comprehend, and they destroyed those things falling from the sky. The shocked crowd finally shrieked at this scenery.

"Nii-san?"

Layfon felt people stepping on his back and he could also hear Nina and the others' angry shouts. They were probably protecting Lucia and Romina.

"Nii-san?"

His siblings repeated, just wanting to confirm the truth.

Layfon felt like a knife was cutting into his heart.

He hadn't seen his siblings since that match. Some of them reproached him. Some may have feared him after watching the match and so they fled..... Even once was enough of an impact for him.

"Nii-san!"

The one who shouted was Stephen.

Layfon closed his eyes. His ears hurt. His heart hurt more. Even part of his body capable of feeling pain hurt. He didn't hear anything more afterwards. No, he couldn't hear it. Wailings, moaning and an angry tide of footsteps shook the earth.

And then,

"Layfon!" came Nina's sharp voice.

And then,

"Oh no, Toby and the others still haven't escaped!" Romina's voice came to his ears. "They're still in the orphanage."

Layfon used most of his strength to keep his teeth from chattering as if something was pressing down on all of his nerves.

"Layfon!" Nina's voice made him choose.

He had already decided what to do when he opened his eyes. What to do? What to do? The painful memories, the place of his past, Grendan. He reached out his hand to Grendan and this meant.....

"..... Senpai, can I ask you to do something?" he opened his eyes and looked at Nina.

"Leave them to me," she nodded once with force. "We'll see them safely to the shelter."

Her strong nod answered him.

"Please!" he said and leapt for the orphanage, for his siblings. The pain in his heart did not disappear. What should he say to them? To his brothers? To Stephen? He had chosen to refuse answering when they questioned him at that time. Still, his body moved now so to protect them. He was scared but he wanted to touch them. Two opposite feelings clashed in his heart. Even he didn't know which road to pick. He was like a ball used in training , rebounding after hitting a wall, halting only when it lost all of its energy.

Perhaps his existence was like this.

Perhaps there was no meaning in meeting with Leerin. Everyone in the orphanage still hated him. He came here because of his immaturity. Perhaps it held no meaning for him.

This implied.....

"Even so....."

He continued to jump.

Anri was silently digging on her own in a corner of the city, behind a fence of evergreen vegetables.

"Anri!"

She didn't stop even though a voice of reproach was calling her.

"Anri! What're you doing!"

Wet soil stuck to her face, but she still kept digging, ignoring that voice. She was holding a toy spade that children used, and she was using it to dig.

"Anri, what is it?"

This time it was her sister's voice. She finally turned around. Standing behind her was an angry Toby and a very worried Rainetta.

"The evacuation siren's been rung. Hurry and head for the shelter."

"..... I'm looking for something! It's okay. Toby-Ni, you guys go ahead!"

"Be sensible! This isn't the time for it!"

"It's all right. The Heaven's Blades are in this city."

"I don't mean that!"

It looked like fire was about to sprout from Toby's throat. Rainetta watched them with suspicion. This situation shouldn't warrant such fury. Filth monsters attacked this city a lot. Although this time the attack closely followed the last time, it wasn't that rare for filth monster warning to sound in a short period of time. Besides, this didn't mean filth monsters would immediately pop up in residential areas even though the city was being attacked. Though Anri and them had experienced many evacuation sirens, the residential areas had never been destroyed. Because the Heaven's Blades would easily defeat them no matter how horrifying the filth monsters were. A battle that didn't need the presence of a Heaven's Blade was of an even lower level.

But Rainetta could feel from Anri's answer that her sense of danger was too low. It couldn't be helped that Toby was angry with her, but Rainetta could also discern that there was more in Toby's anger than met the eyes.

"Anri, Toby's right. This isn't the time for this. Anri, you're a big sister. You can't be a bad influence to the kids."

"That's not it, Nee-san. Toby-Nii isn't angry about that."

"Uh?"

"Hey, stop it."

At Toby's threat, Anri didn't stop digging.

"Toby-Nii just doesn't want me to dig up what he left here."

"Anri!"

She ignored Toby and kept digging with the spade. A feeling of the spade touching something solid shot up her arm. Found it.

"Leave it!"

"Ah."

Toby pulled on her sleeve. She lost her center of gravity and fell to a side.

"Toby. You didn't have to do this!"

"So noisy!"

Anger filled his words. He glared at her. She glared back without losing ground.

"Zuellni's here!"

Anri's voice made Toby and even Rainetta's face fall.

"Layfon-Nii is there. There won't be another chance to apologize to Layfon-Nii if we miss this opportunity."

"Why do I have to apologize to him!" Toby's voice, mixed with pain, echoed in the darkness. "That guy—that guy betrayed us! He was a Heaven's Blade successor but he entered the underground matches. His name as a Military Artist is tainted."

"No!" Anri's voice smothered his. Pain showed in her expression , in Rainetta's too.

They liked Layfon-Nii the best.

The entire orphanage had turned strange since the exposure of Layfon's deed. Toby was always angry. Rainetta was always sad. Their younger siblings cried because of Toby's anger. Father left the responsibility of the orphanage to Romina. Layfon left Grendan and Leerin left the orphanage. Anri could only cover her ears and escape the reality because she was scared. She couldn't do anything.

But she saw it.

Scolded by Toby, beaten. The siblings threw things at him, but Layfon always had his head silently lowered, his face filled with sadness. Anri saw it. Layfon never once explained himself.

"This isn't why Toby-Nii's angry. You're angry because Layfon-Ni has betrayed our expectations!"

"Wu!"

Toby's face turned red. He stood rooted. Anri showed no signs of stopping though she saw his hand turned into a fist. She chanced upon the news that Layfon had been exiled to Zuellni. She heard the entire conversation between Leerin and Father when they were making dinner.

Right now, Zuellni was next to Grendan.

Why? Why?

She was confused about this event that would never have happened. But one thing was clear.

"There may not be another chance! The chance to meet Layfon-Nii and apologize. There won't be another one! Is this all right? Toby-Nii. I don't like it to be like this. Nee-san thinks the same too, don't you?"

The two of them were silent at her question. Their feelings were complicated. They faced her with their backs, unable to give an answer. Anri had decided on what to do regardless of their decision. She tightened her grip on the spade again and continued to dig out that thing.

The thing that Toby hid in here after Layfon left. He hid it in a can originally containing food. He had buried it here.

"Anri!" Toby shouted.

"You didn't throw it away!"

Toby fell silent once more.

At this time.

"Eh?"

"Wuah."

"Ah!"

The city shook intensely.

"Cityquake?"

The evergreen vegetables, the building behind them and the fence were all shaking intensely. Watching the building and the vegetables that seemed about to collapse, Toby forcibly pulled Anri up to a safer place. Still, she held the can tightly before her chest.

"Hey, this doesn't look good. We can talk about this later. Anyway, we've to head for the shelter....."

But it was already too late.

"..... Uh?"

Rainetta looked at the sky, pointing at something.

Monsters were falling through the air shield like rain. After that, a large number of Kei bullets shot them down. The place where Anri lived, an ordinary place, a place that remained peaceful regardless of filth monsters' attack, turned into a battlefield in a split second.

"....."

The three of them forgot what they were doing as they stared at the sky. Huge rumbles hammered the sky. Kei bullets burnt the atmosphere. Shattered chains crossed the sky.

Their hearts must stay calm while facing this sudden change.

"..... Hurry and go," Toby was the first to speak.

"Hurry!"

The shaking had subsided but the city was still shaking. It was difficult to run on the unstable ground. Besides, Anri and Rainetta still hadn't mentally caught up with reality. They couldn't feel their feet touching the ground. They felt more like they were stepping on air, unstable. They couldn't use all of their strength.

"Hurry!"

Not wanting to wait further, Toby took Rainetta's hand and dragged her along after Anri.

But..... The counterattack of the Heaven's Blades wasn't perfect. The small misses were below the smallest decimal point, so a few bullets of monsters still landed on Grendan, and their fall explained the shaking of the city.

And the probability of this tiny decimal, taking into consideration of Grendan's size, was happening right before the three of them.

It landed in front of them.

"AH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Anri didn't know whether she herself or her sister was calling out. The impact of the landing shattered the pavements, and then something hard was blown around in all direction. Low moans of hurt sounded from the direction of the thing that landed. Humid solid things rubbed against each other, giving off an uncomfortable noise. The three collapsed people weren't clear of the situation, but they knew very well what was before them.

"Ah..... Ahhhhhhhhhhhh."

This time it was obviously Anri's voice. The monster opened its hard shell, letting loose its legs and opening its huge lower jaw. Insect-like multifaceted-eyes shone red.

"Uh!" Toby stood before the two girls.

"Toby!"

"You two, hurry and escape!"

"How could you..... Toby!"

Toby's face turned white at Rainetta's wailing, but he still stood in front of the girls, standing before the monster. However, those weren't the only changes in the monster's body.

The shell on the upper body of the monster opened and insect-like wings unfolded. Underneath the shell hid not an insect's soft body, but many ball-shaped things. The balls were just the size of a full-grown male, and there lay about twenty to thirty of them. Cracks appeared on those balls almost the same time as the shell

opened. The cracks spread across the surface until the balls burst. What was inside the balls obtained freedom.

And flew.

The things flying out from the balls landed around the monster. Only four slender legs supported the body. Its shape was like a skeleton's. There were neither muscles nor fat. Sticky membranes covered the joints. Tiny red light shone inside black eye sockets. The new monsters ran for the three.

The three people were so scared that they couldn't even voice their terror.

"Run!" Toby shouted with a trembling voice.

But Toby couldn't prevent the monsters from catching up with the girls even were the girls to escape. Toby wasn't a Military Artist, and he was also weaponless. He was just the average 10 years old child that one could see anywhere. But he still stood before the girls, his arms outstretched to protect them. One knew he was scared just by looking at his shaky legs, but he still stood, unmoving.

"Run!" he repeated.

But Anri and Rainette were motionless. The sudden dark fate swallowed their courage. Their bodies couldn't move.

All was about to end. About to end heartlessly.

They couldn't say sorry to Layfon-Nii, couldn't eat Leerin's handmade cooking, couldn't tease Rainetta and Toby, couldn't fight with the boys at school. Everything was about to end.

"..... No," Anri said.

"Run!" Toby called again.

And an even more intense change happened.

What Anri and the two saw was a pillar of light descending from the sky to destroy the entire monster, then light split off from that pillar to shatter the small monsters, evaporating them. The horror and despair were eliminated so easily.

One person stood on the remnants of the eggs of that monster. The smoke of the explosion dispersed. Anri and the two clearly saw that person's face.

"Ah, ahhh....." Anri felt tears rushing from her eyes.

This person held a Katana the same as Father's. He was eyeing the corpse of the monster with a pair of serious eyes but his face was the same as last time's, filled with a wisp of sadness.

"Layfon-Nii!"

"Toby, Rainetta, Anri, are you hurt?"

"No, it's all right."

"Really? That's good."

From the relieved-Layfon, it felt like he had turned back into the familiar person that they knew.

"Layfon-Nii!" Rainetta finally found her voice and cast her gaze at Toby.

"Toby."

Layfon was also looking at him. Unlike Rainetta and Anri, only Toby's originally despaired gaze was now filled with anger as he glared at him.

"Why now....."

"....."

"How dare you show your face before us now!?" Toby shouted in fury as he cried. His shoulders trembled from his crying. His fists were held tightly as he glared at Layfon angrily.

Anri couldn't say anything. She had been scolding Toby but she couldn't say anything now. Toby still liked Layfon-Nii now, but his intense feeling only added more to her pain.

"..... Wu."

Rainetta covered her mouth with both of her hands. Tears rolled in her eyes as she tried not to call out. Anri too, tried hard not to cry as she watched Toby and Layfon.

".....Till now, I know I have no right to stand before you," Layfon said faintly. His voice made one feel very sad.

"But since I'm here and I met this thing, I couldn't leave you all behind."

"Didn't you already leave us behind!" Toby shouted and ran to Layfon who had stepped down from the corpse. He took hold of the shirt on his chest and howled. "Doing such terrible thing to us and being exiled from the city. Isn't that the same as leaving us behind!"

"....."

"The underground matches. Was there even a need to enter!"

"..... Because I thought money was necessary. Toby, you may have forgotten. There was a severe shortage of food in Grendan's past. There was no food for everyone, but only I, as a Military Artist, was rationed food."

Toby had heard of this from Romina. This happened before Anri was born. A problem appeared in the city's food production plan. Though the problem was solved on time, it had led to a year of food shortage. Many, many people died of starvation.

"I thought that wouldn't have happened if we had money. Lots and lots of money. Of course, the problem couldn't have been solved that easily, but that was how I thought back then. I became a Heaven's Blade successor but I still thought the money wasn't enough, so....."

"But to us..... To me, it's enough to have Layfon-Nii around. ....."

Anri felt she must say something as she watched them. She felt that her relationship with Toby and Layfon might not return to how it was before if a wrong move was made, so she wanted to convey her feelings to him.

"I also think it's enough that Layfon-Nii is around."

But it already took all of her courage to say this. She couldn't say anything more. She lowered her head, feeling bitter at her uselessness.

Rainetta's hand gave her back a pat.

Anri finally realized what she was holding because of her sister's gaze.

"This is what Toby-Nii hid without tossing away."

"Anri dug it up hearing of news about Zuellni."

Anri opened the can in her hand. Inside lay a toy. Though it wasn't a common toy, it was an ordinary toy that no one would be envious of.

A wooden toy. A doll holding a shield and a sword.

"Ah....."

Layfon clearly knew what this was.

Anri didn't know what it was, but she had seen Toby putting it in his personal box. Sometimes he took it out and played with it. She had asked him to lend it to her at home but he wouldn't no matter how much she asked.

"You're still keeping it."

"..... So annoying. I already tossed it away."

"It's Sutero's Roki."

As expected, Anri didn't know what it was. She guessed it was a character in a popular children's animation. Anyway, boys tended to like this kind of thing.

"I' m sorry. I wanted to buy you a better one, but I couldn't get one."

"So annoying. They don't sell it anymore. It's enough I have this, " Toby said angrily and glared at him. "Like this, it's enough..... It's good enough to have this....." his hands fell from Layfon's chest, but one of his hands was still balled into a fist, trembling.

"You idiot. Layfon-Nii is a big idiot."

"Sorry."

Suddenly, Toby threw his fist at him. Layfon could have evaded it as a Miltiary Artist but he didn't move. He silently let his fists fall on his body.

"As I said, don't apologize."

"Uh."

"..... I won't say sorry too."

"Uh."

"This cancels it out."

"Uh."

"You idiot."

Toby's entire body shook. After a moment of hesitation, Layfon placed his hand on his shoulder. Toby muttered again in a light voice. "You idiot."

Anri and Rainetta watched it all.

"..... I don't understand how boys think," Rainetta sighed, but tears rolled in her eyes.

Anri was happy too. Everything was back in order.

But they didn't have time to submerge in joy. Monsters continued to fall from the sky.

"..... Anyway, you three hurry and head to the shelter. Felli."

A piece of metal exuding a faint light flew over to Layfon's voice. Anri immediately knew this was a Psychokinesis flake.

"Please guide these three to a shelter."

(I understand.)

A clear and melodic voice came from the flake.

"Nii-san."

"It seems even all of the Heaven's Blades are unable to guard everything. It'll be bad if the same thing happens. Felli..... senpai is an excellent Psychokinesist, so she'll definitely point out a safe route for you."

"Layfon-Nii, what are you planning to do?"

"I....."

His gaze turned to somewhere faraway at Toby's question. His gaze was there, Grendan's centre. The closer it was to the city's center, the higher the buildings were. And the highest building in the middle of the city was Grendan's palace.

Toby felt Layfon was looking at there.

"I have to see Leerin."

"I see."

Toby was shocked. Layfon's expression was severe. In the palace..... Everyone knew the Queen, Alsheyra Almonise was there. Perhaps Ni-san hated the Queen who exiled him.

"Ah, but Leerin-Nee may be in the shelter."

"It's okay."

It's okay? Toby didn't get it.

"All right, let's go."

But Toby lost his chance to make clear of things because of Layfon's urging. Besides, this wasn't the time to let his guard down . He took Rainetta and Anri's hands and followed the flake to the shelter.

Layfon looked at his siblings' backs till they disappeared, then he cast his gaze at the palace once more.

(As I thought. You're still going.)

Another flake was giving off a faint light beside him.

"..... Sorry."

(I already knew things would turn out like this, so I'm not mad.)

"The captain?"

"They've already arrived at the shelter. The two of them are confirming a safe route back to Zuellni."

"Do you know of Zuellni's situation?"

(Aren't you heading for the palace?)

"..... Felli."

He felt she was hiding something from him. She hadn't told him of Zuellni's situation when Nina was missing and when he was fighting the aged phase filth monster.

He heard her sigh on the other end of the flake.

(I still can't contact Zuellni. That unbelievable monster has surrounded the other side of the air shield.)

"Then Zuellni....."

(We can only pray the other side isn't in the same situation.)

Layfon felt a future filled with darkness waited for him. Intense fights were taking place everywhere. He had never seen this before in Grendan, a monster wrapping around the entire city and suppressing it. All of the Heaven's Blade successors were defending the city.

This had never happened before.

This must be the mysterious fight related to the world that Nina talked about. If this was true.....

He had always been thinking of Leerin's refusal to see him after he heard of Nina and Lucia's opinions. At that time, it was impossible for him to win against the Queen and Lintence. He could only drag out the fight longer with Lintence even if he held the Heaven's Blade.

But this was something Leerin wouldn't understand.

Besides, the Heaven's Blades knew the Queen was the strongest Military Artist. Even if one wasn't a Heaven's Blade, a slightly better Military Artist could tell how powerful she was by looking at the unusual amount of Kei exuding from her.

Ordinary people thought the Queen being the strongest was just propaganda from the palace.

This couldn't be helped since the Queen had never fought before. And even if she did fight, no one from the city would have known. Layfon knew some people thought it was propaganda to strengthen the royal family's dignity.

He didn't know if Leerin thought the same, but at that split second, it shouldn't be strange for her to think he couldn't save her from them.

No..... Leerin wouldn't think like that.

It was more like her not to allow him to do something so dangerous. But what if this wasn't the case?

What if she truly, truly wanted from the bottom of her heart to return to Grendan and so she refused him? At that time, to leave without telling anyone of her reason..... Perhaps it had something to do with the mystery that Nina talked about.

He thought maybe he was thinking too much.

But pondering led him nowhere. Could he only confirm his suspicion if he were to see her face to face? Why did she refuse him? What was she thinking to return to Grendan at that particular point in time? Why did he want to straighten out these things?

He could only confirm all of it when he met Leerin.

"I really should head back to Zuellni with the Captain....."

(Please don't talk about the impossible.)

Felli heartlessly cut off his words.

"Felli....."

(You came to Zuellni in order to change yourself. Has this changed?)

"No, it hasn't."

He nodded subconsciously at the sudden question, not sure what she was getting at.

(My feeling stays the same. I'll definitely pursue it if there's another path other than being a Psychokinesist. That was why I came to Zuellni.)

"Yes."

(But if you came back to Zuellni the way you are now, you'll only be halting your progress.)

"Perhaps so....."

(Then please resolve this knot in your heart. Regardless of the result, it's better to understand than to worry and not understand anything.)

"Perhaps so."

(But there's only one thing I want to know. Is that all right?)

"What is it?"

(.....)

Felli herself brought up the question, yet she stayed silent.

"Uh, Felli....."

Had something happened on the other side of the flake? Sound finally came through when Layfon decided to touch the flake.

(Well, it's like that.....)

"What?"

(Lay... fon..... Layfon.....)

Why did she change her words, and she said so two times too.... ..

(Layfon, what kind of a person is Leerin to you?)

"..... Eh?"

He didn't quite understand the meaning behind her question. Unlike the usual light tone, Felli seemed to have trouble speaking and her rhythm was also a bit flustered. He couldn't get her meaning.

"Uh.....?"

But she didn't stop.

(Are you two just simple childhood friends? Or do you like her? Or are you two lovers?)

"Well, well....."

He recalled that night before they fought Falnir. He had received the proof of reconciliation from Derek. His nerves had finally relaxed. He cried. Leerin cried too and then.....

He remembered it.

No. He couldn't have forgotten it.

At that time, their lips overlapped as if he was to relax all his thoughts inside him. His brain became blank in that one split second. He was too happy. Tears of happiness couldn't be stopped, and that was the only emotion filling his head.

And that was a very normal act he made without much consideration. He didn't think Felli had seen that.

Then what was the meaning behind this question?

"Well....."

He didn't know what to say, but he opened his mouth, thinking it was bad not to say something.

And he sensed it before he thought of what to say.

(Fon fon?)

"Please have the flake move away."

(..... A Military Artist. Just one person.)

Felli felt it too. The huge amount of Kei had suddenly closed in. Had this person been watching him through Sakkei? But to come and find Layfon rather than fight the monsters in this situation? What was his purpose?

(Please be careful. This person can only have come for you under these circumstances. I feel he has a purpose.)

Felli felt the same as him. Her flake left.

In Layfon's hand was the Iron Dite. He made this choice without much thought. From the Kei of the other person, Layfon had chosen to rely on the skill that would best suit this fight, meaning the Iron Dite. But was this right? His opponent's figure appeared before him as he pondered.

"..... Why?"

The person whom he couldn't believe to see had appeared before him.

"Layfon. It's been a long time."

He couldn't feel that feeling in his words. Something was mixed in with the hard words as those words hammered his heart.

"Why are you here, Father?"

This was his foster father. The restored Iron Dite in his hand held the same shape as Layfon's. He was watching Layfon with a serious gaze that he never used in the orphanage. A gaze that was rarely seen in the dojo.

"But that ends here. The place you should return to is Zuellni."

"Father....."

Layfon didn't understand.

"Hurry, return to Zuellni. But..... that's only if you can head back immediately."

The sharp blade of his father was pointed at him.

Father's Sakkei was conveyed to the son.

"I'll attack you with this Katana."

Father said such unbelievable words as at the same time, Kei exploded.

Chapter 4 - To Block the Road Ahead

There would be no chance of Leerin appearing in battle. Alsheyra would ensure this. Even Leerin herself didn't know what she could do in the battle.

Her right eye wasn't normal, and that was all she knew.

To the eyes of the audience who observed the battle, Leerin's position was that of a VIP. Originally, the city's flag was placed on the top of the tall tower located in the middle of Grendan, the palace that was the highest point of the city. Leerin and Alsheyra were together, surrounded by the building built without any sense of aesthetics as the storm blew in through the windows without hesitation. The destructive wind. Just its remnants were enough to send Leerin's body flying.

Alsheyra had come over here after greeting the Heaven's Blades . Leerin and Saya had followed her.

This wasn't a safe place. Perhaps there wasn't a place considered safe in this city. The intensity of the battle taking place on the other side of the window was one that Leerin had never seen before. The Nano Celluloid Interface monster M Durindana covered the entire city. The Heaven's Blade successors were countering it with unbelievable power. An impossible battle was now on stage.

But what next?

Even if the monster's resilience wasn't limitless, the current situation wasn't advantageous for Grendan. Heaven's Blade successors and normal Military Artists were just normal humans. Their physical strength was limited. Though the trump card, Alsheyra, was here, according to Delbone, the Queen's power could only be used once. Not that she would use up all of her power, but that the city itself couldn't sustain the recoil of her attack.

A world that couldn't give people freedom. Even if one wanted to live ordinarily, the space of his movement was confined to the limits of the city. He still had to live constantly with the fear of being taken away by filth monsters. He would be limited by other things even if he had the strength to break through that fear.

What was something that Leerin could do?

What could this right eye do?

The eye that should have been born with Alsheyra had grown in Leerin. What meaning did this impossible event hold in this situation? Did it mean Leerin herself could do nothing? Or that Leerin's eye and Alsheyra's power must be separated? If these two things couldn't stay separated, they would not be able to overcome this crisis.

Leerin felt she was more useful if she thought of it this way.

It was very painful for her to be so useless. It already took her huge determination to stand here. It would be too heartless if she still couldn't do anything at this stage.

So she asked a question.

She asked a question of herself.

What could she do? If she could do something, what would the effect be?

So Leerin took down the blindfold and let the eyeball, carved with a cross made of thorns, expose itself in the air. This was hers but at the same time it wasn't. The pupil of the moon was here to protect Saya who created this world. Airen became the moon to seal off the enemies. This was his pupil.

This pupil existed to protect Saya. It must be here to do something and so Leerin took down the blindfold.

(Set their gravestones.)

"Eh?"

(Adorn everything disturbing my sleep with the thorns of the graveyard.)

It wasn't a voice that Leerin heard for it suddenly appeared in her mind in the form of written words, resounding in her head as if she were reading it out herself. She felt that ahead of the words was a road of blood. It continued to grind against itself till pain came. At the end of that road, something was waiting for her.

This was the road she was to take, but it wasn't enough.

All Leerin understood was the intention of her right eye, the purpose of its existence. She had seen some of its power in the depth of the Inner Court. She had seen it even before she arrived there, while she was in Zuellni. When she saw numerous eyeballs, or you could say, tombs. That must be it.

But was this all? Was that all she could do?

There wasn't anything else. Could she, as an average person, do nothing in this situation?

She concentrated more in order to find an answer.

What then surfaced in her mind were twelve dots of light.

Questions kept piling up. And they then brought out another question. That was "Why?"

Unanswered questions kept accumulating. Weight that didn't exist in reality kept accumulating as if to press down on Layfon till it overloaded him.

"Why?" he asked and was ignored.

A cut path responded to his question. Vivid Kei cut apart the dimness. The intense Sakkei attempted to cut through Layfon. Layfon received the attack by the Katana that held the same shape. The weight pressing down on his hands made him understand his opponent wasn't joking with him.

At the same time.....

"Why?"

His foster father was strong. Though he was retired, his skill was the same as and maybe had already surpassed Haia's. But the amount of his Kei was probably below Haia's. The difference between pure power of Kei would be more obvious in a fight than the difference in technique. This gap of power would become a difference in strength when the two fought, using their own skills.

Layfon had always thought that Derek's Kei was of a lower level than Haia. Why did he think of it? Because the Derek standing before him now was not the same.

"Why?"

What meaning did this question hold? Why must they fight? Why had Derek's amount of Kei increased?

Katana clashed against Katana. Layfon should have won overwhelmingly through the increasing density of his muscles because of internal Kei. Plus this was in turn boosted by the amount of Kei in his body. But he couldn't do it now. Not that Derek's sudden assault on him had swayed him psychologically, but that his sudden increase in strength was unbelievable.

Layfon received Derek's strike as he pondered. This took only a split second. The weight of the strike made his knee touch the ground, confirming his suspicion.

"Father....."

"....."

Layfon called out but Derek didn't reply.

"Why? I just want to see Leerin....."

"I already said you can't."

"Eh?"

Derek kicked at him.

It wasn't a surprise attack but Layfon didn't move. Derek had put his entire center of gravity into this kick. The two weapons lost their delicate balance as the sole of his foot was about to touch Layfon's abdomen. Layfon leapt back. The Kei surrounding Derek's foot destroyed their surroundings, kicking up a screen of smoke. Derek readied his pose and closed in on him again.

"Why?"

"Because this is Leerin's wish."

He stabbed the earth with his Katana.

Psyharden technique – Moving Ground.

The attack broke apart the earth as it headed for Layfon. Derek's figure was already gone by the time Layfon blocked the attack with external Kei.

Internal Kei variation – Fleeting Shadows.

Behind him. This was an illusion Derek created. The presence of people surrounding him.

But the real body was..... above him.

Derek was already close to him when he raised his Katana to point upward. Blade weaved against blade as sparks of Kei dispersed. Layfon's Kei that ran up along the blade cancelled out

Derek's. They widened their distance using the rebound of the attack. And then they should counterattack. That should have been what it was like.

"Why!?" Layfon called.

Why was Derek, his foster father, blocking his way? Why was he rejecting his wish to see Leerin? This question weighed more than the increasing amount of Kei.

When Layfon had already reconciled with Toby. He should have already reconciled with Derek too. The Katana in his hand was his proof.

So why?

"You're wrong," Derek said curtly.

"Uh!"

Derek was already before him and chopping down with his weapon. Layfon backed off as he received one attack after another. The attack repeated itself many times. The cut paths weaved themselves together, striking at him no matter where he went as if to push him back to Zuellni.

"My anger for you had already disappeared."

A strike that came diagonally from above.

"I no longer regret what you did."

Next he turned his blade to cut upward.

"But if this is what my daughter wished for."

The cut path changed to horizontal. Layfon blocked it with the handle of his Katana.

"Then the duty to prevent you from seeing her should lie with her father."

"Why."

Layfon was speechless at his reason. But.....

Psyharden technique – Shepherd's Crook.

"Um!"

Feeling the murderous intent nearing his neck, he quickly crouched. The scythe of the death god swept over his head. The external Kei at the tip of the Katana turned into a sharp scythe and cut through the position that was previously Layfon's neck.

No matter how he looked at it, Derek's murderous intent was real.

The attack following the crouching Layfon came straight after. He backed off immediately. The Katana that stabbed into the earth shattered the ground.

"If you don't intend to fight, then go away."

Derek's cold words cut into his chest. Layfon's face screwed up in tension at this invisible attack that he was unable to defend against.

"This is such a place. The person named Layfon Alseif is no longer registered in Grendan even though you're my son. He's already dead along with the title Wolfstein."

"How could it....."

He failed to say much. He couldn't utter anything else because he had too much he wanted to say. So much that he didn't know where to begin. But..... his anger increased at the end of his words.

"……Why can't I see Leerin, Father?"

"Don't make me repeat myself. This is what she wishes for."

"Why does she think this way?"

"She made this choice herself, or do you think I'm lying? Perhaps I'd lie to you about Her Majesty, but I wouldn't lie to you about my daughter's words."

"I never doubted you!"

Layfon had already forgotten himself. Kei continued to pour out of his body, hammering the air with its huge noise and chasing away the noise of the surrounding fights. The light enveloping Layfon twisted.

"Why doesn't anyone tell me the reason!"

This was why he was angry. Derek didn't say anything. He only said Leerin had said "to return". He did it to for his daughter's will. The two of them had not told him the real reason behind their words.

Even though they were a family. That they were father and son.

Why. Why didn't they tell him anything?

"Am I that unreliable? Am I that impotent?"

That was true. He was unreliable and impotent. Just what had he done so far? He participated in underground matches. The Heaven's Blade was taken away from him and in the end, he was exiled from Grendan. He hadn't even lived the life he wanted when he was in Zuellni. He continued to live as a Military Artist.

He was only living by following the flow.

He didn't have a clear goal. All he wanted was to solve the problems before him. That was how he had been living.

"But we're a family. If there's something I can do, something, I.....
....."

He couldn't make a complete sentence. Because his face was also very sad as Kei continued to flow out of his body through anger.

"What would you do if that family rejects you?"

"Eh!"

Layfon looked at him with a serious expression as he heard this new question.

"What would you do if this family says it doesn't want to have any ties with you anymore?"

Derek's words had proven everything that Lucia had said. No. What Lucia speculated had become reality the moment Derek came out to stop him. Leerin herself had made up her mind about something and she was trying to stay some distance from him. Lucia said Layfon shouldn't go see her. Leerin wouldn't change her mind once she made her decision. He also understood how stubborn she could be.

But Leerin's stubbornness and Layfon being unable to meet her weren't related at all.

They didn't want to have ties with him?

Why?

Because Grendan hated him?

"It doesn't matter," he said. "I've already decided to meet Leerin. I've been lost, troubled, but now I've decided. I want to meet her, hear her reasons and then decide what to do next. I've already made up my mind!"

It wasn't a problem to him if Leerin didn't want him close because the people of Grendan hated him. If he cared about how other people looked at him, he wouldn't have participated in the underground matches. He would still have been living honestly in Grendan, enjoying the privileges given to a Heaven's Blade successor. The current Layfon was here because he failed to do that.

"If there's something I can do, it doesn't matter even if a problem in Grendan is to arise from it," Layfon called out, conveying all of his intention to Derek.

Derek's expression remained serious and unchanged.

"..... As I thought, you really are my son," he murmured without any changes in his expression.

He lifted the tip of his blade and pointed it at Layfon. It wasn't words this time. The tip of his katana was pointing at him and Kei released from his body.

"Then defeat me and let me see your will."

Katana and katana fought once again. The father and master said so to Layfon.

Nothing had happened till now.

"The problem is, what do we do next?"

Nina's shock at the scenery before her only lasted a few seconds before she was called back by Sharnid's unhappy voice. She nodded at him.

They really hadn't had any problems till now. The two of them had come to the outer edge after parting with Lucia and Felli at the shelter. They walked past some Military Artists on the way here but they didn't seem to notice them.

They didn't have any more energy left to spend on Nina and Sharnid.

The scenery before them confirmed Nina's thoughts.

The outer edge that was wider than Zuellni's had turned into a tragic battlefield. One of the performers in this battle was the monster that covered the entire city. It didn't invade the city itself, or maybe it couldn't do it. Numerous creatures shot out from its skin like rain. They attempted to destroy this city.

Only one person stood on the other spot on the stage.

A group of Military Artists waited further back in the outer edge in case some creatures slipped through. But only one person was enough to handle the rainstorm of live-bullets.

Yes, just by looking at him with your naked eyes, the word " handle" was most suitable for what he was doing.

The man named Lintence Savoleid Harden.

One of his hands rested by his side, not doing anything. And even more unbelievable was that his other hand was near his mouth, holding a cigarette between his fingers.

Even so, what was happening before Nina was still hard to believe.

The rainstorm of living bullets passed through the air shield continuously to attack Grendan. To put it another way, it was as if Grendan was the enemy of the entire world. Or that a gargantuan hand was trying to grind down the entire Grendan.

He still looked calm with plenty of room to spare in this situation.

But the Kei exuding from his body was enough to make Nina feel numb. Lintence's Kei seemed to be released from the dimension itself.

It was very weak, but one could still see the light of his Kei if one looked carefully.

So weak..... such weak light. But perhaps Nina's lack of power could only show her this much light. This light might be more intense and rich for Layfon who could steal moves just by watching the flow of Kei. Still, even such weak light was dense. The master who taught Layfon the Steel Thread technique. The light of Kei that Nina saw now. One could say she was looking at Lintence's steel threads.

The entirety of this space, the area of the outer edge that Lintence was responsible for, Nina couldn't even take in the entire area through her eyes. The light of Kei ran in this wide space. There wasn't any gap on the net-like wall weaved by the steel threads.

It wasn't a line, but a surface.

There were several surfaces overlapping each other in the outer edge. The live-bullets crashed into the surface and were cut into powder as of a moth flying towards fire.

"..... To think he can sustain this scenery. If it were me, I'd have vomited."

Nina nodded in agreement to Sharnid's comment. She wiped away the cold sweat on the neck as she realized that she might have thought too highly of her power after obtaining the Haikizoku. If Layfon was here, she could ask him how to use the maximum level of Kei most efficiently in this formation that Lintence that weaved, but even though the efficiency was high..... so if not one drop of Kei was wasted, it was shocking enough that the Kei was running through every single steel thread, and there were so many thousands of threads here. This wasn't just because of Lintence's huge power but also his ability of control, freely controlling so many unruly steel threads. Both of those abilities were being shown, indescribably, in front of Nina.

"So what should we do? Zuellni is on the other side judging by the direction, but....." Sharnid stopped speaking.

Nina had seen it when she left the palace and escaped. Their direction was correct. Felli couldn't establish contact with Zuellni because of this monster's interference. In this case, they had to escape this monster's embrace to ensure the Academy was safe.

"Zuellni....."

Nina had made this promise after she came to the Academy. She had promised to protect the Electronic Fairy. Nina felt ashamed for forgetting this promise.

"Even though we find a way to get past this monster, we still have to go through this steel wall first. And that looks very difficult."

"Either way, we must get past this point."

"That's why I want to know a way."

Sharnid suddenly felt very tired. Sure, his words were worth taking note of. No. He had accurately grasped hold of the current situation.

The usual Nina wouldn't be able to do anything about the two difficulties before her; whether it was the steel threads or the monster. But right now, Nina had the Haikizoku's power. There might be a way to get past this point. No, this was the biggest power she could use for her current self. She had to rely on her only weapon to break through this stalemate. As for its effect, she could only wait and see.

In this period of wait and see involved a lot of hope. She didn't know whether her strength was enough to make a hole in the monster's body. She wouldn't know the result if she didn't try. Because no one knew how thick this monster's body was.

But she must give it a try.

"..... Then, what're you planning?" Sharnid sighed as he looked at her with a "giving up" expression.

"Like this."

The two of them were standing on the edge of the outer edge area. She called out to Lintence straight after she answered his question.

"I want to go to Zuellni!"

Her voice was loud. There was no doubt that Lintence had heard her. No, he should have already noticed them for someone of his caliber. And Delbone should have already caught their presence even if Lintence hadn't noticed them.

But he didn't turn his head to look at them. Only a thin thread of smoke wafted from his body.

"I have to make a hole in this monster's body and go to Zuellni!" she called again.

"Hey....."

Sharnid didn't even have time to feel helpless. All he felt was confusion and fear. The most straightforward method was to tell the other side what they wanted. Since they couldn't go through the wall with their power, they had to persuade Lintence. Of course, this was more rational than coercing him through force.

The problem was Lintence was a Heaven's Blade successor. He was the one who made Nina unconscious so he could take her away. Perhaps he might recapture her along with Sharnid. But she didn't feel he would do that and that was why she did what she did.

If this wasn't the case, Lintence would have obtained her location from Delbone and recaptured her before she met Layfon.

But he didn't do it. So, it didn't matter.

"....."

Lintence turned his face to her, taking down the cigarette.

She could only see the corner of his mouth.

But she saw it. The corner of his mouth was moving.

"Go if you can do it."

She felt that was what he said.

"Hey hey....."

And a hole opened up in the wall of steel threads before them.

"Really? We only said we'll try."

Helplessness and shock mixed in with Sharnid's words.

A hole opened up in one of the steel thread layers, but it closed after Nina and Sharnid passed through it. A hole then opened in the next layer. The defense of the steel threads was lowered as long as a hole was opened. There was risk involved and that was why Lintence was using this way to open a path for them.

At last, they came to the last layer.

Lintence would open a new hole for them if they were to take a step closer.

Numerous live-bullets crashed into the steel threads before them and were cut into pieces. Corpses fell next to their feet.

"What will you do next?"

Nina felt the steel threads were asking her.

She restored her Dite and readied her pose.

Raijin.

This was the only move for it.

But numerous live-bullets would attack like a rainstorm the moment the steel threads opened. It would be a furious strike,

giving her not even a moment to concentrate her Kei. They would become food if they made one wrong move. Their bodies would easily become mincemeat. A small amount of defensive Kei was meaningless in this situation.

But there was no other way.

"I won't let the captain be the only one who looks cool."

"Sharnid?"

"I can't defeat every one of them but I'll shoot down all of those that seem like they will hit you. But I can't keep that up for long. We've to finish this as quickly as possible."

Layfon would have understood what he meant but not Nina. Felli's flake was behind her. She must have wanted to explain something as the flake moved close to Nina.

"I see. Then please take care of it," Nina nodded before Felli had a chance to explain.

(You don't even know anything but you agreed so easily.)

"What're you saying?"

Perhaps Felli found her words surprising, but Nina didn't like it that they doubted her words.

"I trust all members in the 17th platoon. Sharnid must have a way since he said to leave it to him. Then all I need do is wait for the result."

She had developed a relationship of trust with them through the platoon matches. This wasn't just Sharnid but Layfon and Felli, and the ones who weren't here, Dalshena and Naruki. She trusted them. She trusted that they wouldn't lie to her and do something that they didn't have confidence in.

(.....)

The flake wordlessly left Nina and moved to stay behind her. It seemed to be expressing Felli's helpless sigh, but Nina didn't notice it. She was only watching the space before her.

"You have to immediately catch up with me after I release my move. If it's the same as a filth monster, it should also have the ability to regenerate."

"Roger."

She prepared her move as he replied.

She had been putting some of her mind to the presence of Kei since Layfon taught it to her. An amount of Kei flowed continuously in the Kei vein and that had enabled it to receive training just like her own muscles. It was able to reach the level that she hoped for.

And right now, her goal was set even higher as if she was challenging her physical limit. The stirring of her Kei vein increased in speed. It must be able to raise itself higher. She believed her level wasn't just this much. She continued to increase the flow of Kei, pushing its density to the limit.

And then.....

Melnisc.

She called in her heart.

(I obey.)

The golden goat, the Haikizoku that lived inside Nina, the Electronic Fairy that had turned insane because of anger, calmly replied. A power from a different place poured into the Kei vein. The power that was originally used to move a city, to sustain the lives of an entire city, now turned into Kei and forcibly flowed into Nina's body. And this Kei flowed to the outside of her body through her breath, exuding blue light.

An enormous amount of Kei.

"Um....."

She tolerated the heavy pressure of this sudden increase of Kei. She didn't notice this when she fought the giants, but an amount of Kei that surpassed hers was continuously pouring into her. This was a forceful act to help her exceed her limits and so pain spread throughout her entire body.

Perhaps Melnisc was more serious this time, giving everything it had to inject his Kei into Nina's body. Nina didn't know, but this monster, Nano Celluloid Interface M Durindana, was the source of all filth monsters.

The source of the Haikizoku's hatred.

Still, she tolerated the pain to chase after power, constantly increasing the Kei inside her. She kept raising it because she didn't know how thick this monster's body was.

Lintence was probably watching them. The timing was perfect. A hole appeared immediately in the steel thread wall. A safe path suddenly appeared before the live-bullets that had been self-exploding without ceasing. The live-bullets could only keep flying straight as they fell, but this hole was too big. Big enough for Nina and of course, big enough for the live-bullets. They closed in on her at high speed.

But she didn't move. One's reaction was to reflexively release her move while facing such an overwhelming presence.

But she didn't do it.

She had already said that she'd leave it to him.

A Kei bullet brushed past Nina. The shot felt weak because the original quality of the weapon, a gun, and the setting of it didn't make the density of Kei that high. But this shot of Kei bullet hit a location a bit further beyond the creature and created an unexpected result. The shell of the creature spidered into cracks and destroyed itself. The changes happened too fast. The Kei bullet had changed the creature's trajectory, making it head for the wall of Steel Threads.

Nina didn't turn around while Felli watched Sharnid through her flake.

The light of Kei surrounded his right eye.

Internal Kei variation – Ocular Sight.

This move referred to the dot being used on the gun so to target things better. This was one of the basic internal Kei variants a sniper must learn first. It was very hard to snipe without using this move to strengthen one's eye vision.

And Ocular Sight had strengthened this technique even more.

Not only could Sharnid see his opponent standing far away, he could also see his targets. Sharnid's eye had captured its opponent's weak point as it captured his image. All that he needed do next was to shoot the Kei bullet. His target would go down.

Of course, he could only do this if his sniping skill was accurate.

Layfon said this was a dangerous move. Sharnid was increasing his level of Kei, executing the move he usually made while strengthening his body so he could hit his target more accurately.

More creatures attacked them. A second creature immediately took the space vacated by the first one. Sharnid continued to shoot. The creatures that got shot had the same fate as the first creature, deflecting and heading for the wall of Steel Threads.

Nina finally went beyond her limit and released her move when Sharnid made the fourth shot.

Combined Internal and External Kei variation – Raijin.

Rumbles instantly conquered the field. The huge snake of thunder created by the two iron whips evaporated one creature after another as it headed for the monster on the other side of the air shield.

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!"

Nina howled. The sound of rumbles swallowed her roar and became much louder as if to condense her will. The mad snakes of thunder came together because of the iron whips that Nina crossed in front of her. It became a beast of lighting and hurled itself out with fangs bared. It burst through the air shield with Nina and, aiming at a point on the monster's body, a point that was so tiny compared to the entire body, she struck with the iron whips.

The destructive power of the strike hit one point of the body, seeped in and created a chain of explosions. Nina didn't stop. The destructive power cut straight into the monster's body as she continued to release Kei, making the monster unable to repair itself .

Forward, destroy, move forward and continue to destroy.

Behind Nina was the inside of the monster's body, an overwhelming sense of being swallowed. Nina felt it even though she was in the world of Raijin.

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!" she roared to dispel that feeling. She kept moving forward.

Finally, she burst through.

"Ah!"

She fell onto the ground.

She had never executed such a powerful Raijin before. The remnants of the ripples caused confusion in her consciousness. This only lasted for a short moment, but that was the truth. Nina shook her head to confirm her surroundings. She was on the bridge linking Zuellni and Grendan. She could see the city's legs. This meant she must be in Zuellni since she was inside an air shield.

"Hurry and run!"

Sharnid was running madly through the hole inside the monster's body and already, the flesh behind him was regenerating, attempting to close up the hole. He flew out of the hole as it sealed itself after him.

"That was exciting!" he panted.

Nina picked up the thing lying beside him. The flake that had come through with Sharnid had become a simple metal piece because the refilled hole had cut off the transmission of Psychokinesis. This was the end of contact with Grendan.

"We'll come back for you," she said to the flake she held it tightly in her hand.

She then urged Sharnid forward as they ran for the place where the Student President was.

The blades weaved together. The Iron Dite cut through the dim atmosphere. The light of Kei became streaks, the scars of the sky. The two opponents' eyes were round as the two men continued to exchange positions, and they were both in the air. The creatures shot out from the monster's body continued to fall around them and in front of them. The rain of creatures became a rainstorm. They were blocked by a pillar of light covering the city's sky that prevented them from falling into the city.

That pillar of light seemed to be the Kei bullets of Barmelin. Barmelin was continuously shooting Kei bullets from two gun barrels, creating a river that continued to swallow the creatures.

And Layfon was in a position above that river.

If they went up a bit more, they could touch the air shield. Layfon and Derek jumped and used the creatures as their platforms. Their blades danced in the air.

"....." "....."

They had nothing to say.

Or one should say they had missed their chance to make any questions. Both were moving their blades through their will. Layers of cut paths were drawn in the sky, cutting the creatures into pieces.

But both were canceling each other's moves as they read them. The apprentice who was using moves he learnt from his master. He was familiar with his master's movements.....

And the master who faced his apprentice's moves. He understood his every movement. Even though his apprentice was using moves that went beyond him, moves that he created himself. ....

And the master was canceling those attacks through the experience that he held, experience that his apprentice didn't have.

Kei, as one of the abilities of a Military Artist, couldn't so simply fill up the gap, but it had now become something equivalent. Why did the master have the same amount of Kei as his student and was using it? This was unbelievable. But the student understood

that knowing the reason now wouldn't have made any difference to his situation.

The master decided to stand before his apprentice. The apprentice decided to surpass his master. Perhaps this intention was related to this amount of Kei, but this wasn't the reason behind his master's decision. The master still stood before him even if he couldn't fill up the gap of strength in Kei.

In order to fulfill his will.

"Um!"

The cut paths clashed in a roar. The handles of the blades touched each other. On the other side of the blade was the harsh countenance of his master. The fight of Kei had changed the density of the air and twisted the vision.

They were on par in terms of technique.

External Kei variation. Internal Kei variation. They were on par.

There existed adaptable techniques in Psyharden even in the situation of two fighters holding off each other with the handles of their katana. The sparks created by the tiny clash adorned the two of them.

But it wasn't permitted to hold each other for long.

Shot down by Barmelin's Kei, the creatures would change their direction no matter where Barmelin's Kei hit, even if it was the tip of a nose. In the end, they were taken into the rushing river and

became powder. The two fighters could only leapt away from their makeshift platforms and released long distance moves in the air to restrain each other.

Their moves cancelled each others' out.

They were on par in terms of external and internal strength, as well as on Kei techniques.

It was as if the current Derek held the same level of Kei as a Heaven's Blade successor.

(But.....)

The lightning of cutting paths struck the rain of creatures. Layfon pondered as he released his moves. Since both of them held a Heaven's Blade successor's level of Kei, then they must be limiting their Kei output through the Dite.

(I don't think father has completely grasped hold of the control of such Kei.)

Just when did Derek's Kei increase exponentially? If it happened over a long period of time, it must have occurred right after Layfon left Grendan. If it wasn't the case and was a recent event..... the timing between these two possibilities was huge. But it took Layfon a long time to master controlling his when he found out a normal Dite couldn't hold all of his Kei. It hadn't been a year since he left Grendan, so it wasn't possible for Derek to be able to take full control of the Kei he now held.

The pain Layfon suffered when he was still immature couldn't compare with the pain a fully matured Military Artist had endured , but the current Layfon had found out his opponent's weak point and he wouldn't let that go.

Besides, there was one more thing.

"....."

He held the handle of his Dite in a tight grip.

The weapon he gave up when he became a Heaven's Blade successor was his katana. And the first weapon that trapped him in such a situation was also the katana.

The crisis of a food shortage.

The minute reason of Layfon being a Military Artist gave him more food to eat than the other kids in the orphanage. The city would face destruction if its Military Artists' strengths were low. Food shortage had trapped the city in a crisis, but that wasn't the only crisis the city faced. Layfon was rationed with more food because he was a Military Artist. None of his siblings agreed with him, though he wanted to share his food with them.

Because he was a Military Artist.

He was the city's protector.

But he held a different opinion at that time.

No, what he wanted to protect wasn't the city but everyone in the orphanage. And he wanted to protect all orphanages in the city . He felt that he should protect all who were in the same situation as him.

Derek's katana had given direction to his feelings. Layfon continued to hone his skill and continued to climb upward as a Military Artist. He stood in a position that was higher than anyone else to protect the orphans of Grendan. This was the face he should have. This was the road his blade pointed out for him.

Layfon held that katana right now. He was releasing his move through the blade that pointed his path out for him. What pained him more was the fact that he was fighting the father who raised him in the orphanage. The murderous intent and fire of iron, blood and death weaved through this field.

The monster that covered the sky, the creatures shooting out of the monster's body, that all the Heaven's Blades were battling and yet were unable to stop this whirlwind. Father and son fought in this insane situation.

(No matter what.....)

Layfon had decided.

Even if..... that too.

He jumped to the boundary of the air shield and landed on a creature. He let his Kei explode, increase, refine, continued to

increase the density level. The particles of dust in the air around him burnt because of the Kei he released.

He buried his blade deeply in the vicinity of his left waist. His left hand pressed down on the blade.

He was ready to pull out the weapon.

Derek was in a position almost on the same line as Layfon and making the same pose.

The two of them were thinking the same thing. Or that Derek felt there wasn't any other move better than this.

This would have fallen right into Layfon's lap if it were the latter.

Psyharden technique – Water mirror. Reflected Water Ferry.

A silent, high-speed technique. Both fighters appeared on the creature they wanted in the next split second. They took away their left hands that were pressing down the blades.

Psyharden technique – Flame Cut.

The two flame writhed cut paths clashed into each other. The two Keis clung to each other like glue. The two moves were fighting each other.

And the result was as expected.

"Haaaaaaaaaaaa!"

Layfon continued to raise the level of his Kei. He kept pouring Kei into the Dite even though it far exceeded the amount the Iron Dite was capable of receiving. A slight error occurred in the external Kei that were glued to each other, almost deciding the direction of the explosion.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhh!"

Derek roared. Father was also pouring Kei into his Dite and turning it into external Kei. The two Kei became glue-like again.

And then.....

Kei continued to rise and rise and rise and surpassed the limit of the Dites.

The blades gradually turned red hot and then both Dites exploded.

Both fighters threw away their Dites and pulled open the distance between them. The explosion hadn't affected Layfon but his chest hurt. He had lost his Iron Dite. This wasn't the first time he had lost a weapon as it had occurred several times in Zuellni. His lack of control of Kei before he became a Heaven's Blade successor had damaged many Dites. He could ask Harley to make another Iron Dite when he returned to Zuellni. Harley had the data of his Dite. He could use the same material to make a Dite that was the same in shape, weight and balance.

But that Dite would never return.

The proof of father's forgiveness, the symbol of reconciliation that Leerin brought him, would never return.

This pain grinded at Layfon.

But.....

He watched Derek as he bore this invisible pain.

Derek didn't have anything in his hand. He also wasn't holding another Dite in his weapon harness.

Exactly as Layfon suspected.

But in Layfon's weapon harness were three Dites, the Sapphire Dite, the Adamantium Dite and the Shim Adamantium Dite.

It would end here.

He had lost the Iron Dite, the proof of reconciliation. Even so, he wouldn't kill the father who had lost his weapon. He would only keep on going.

Though he didn't mean to let down his guard, the sense of relief and pain spreading through him wasn't a lie.

But Derek wasn't aiming for that. In reality, he didn't seem to want to.

Layfon didn't miss his reaction, but the appearance of that thing was too sudden.

A thing of nostalgia. That thing was closing in with incredible speed.

Unbelievable.

That thing was heading right for them as if it didn't want the fight to end like this.

"No way.....?"

Layfon's gaze moved away from Derek, but Derek wasn't moving.

His father had felt it too.

That thing flew into the sky, becoming a streak of white light. It flew for the position in between Layfon and Derek. It hit a creature and the light suddenly disappeared.

The creature was destroyed, leaving behind a tiny thing. It was very tiny compared to the huge creature it just destroyed.

It was rumored to be a material that didn't exist outside Grendan.

"A Heaven's Blade....."

The line of trajectory slowly faded.

Heaven's Blade.

Wolfstein.

The thing that Layfon held in the past.

He thought of that and immediately reacted. Derek moved too. He leaped for the weapon in order to fulfill his will. Layfon wouldn't let him take it. He couldn't let the fight drag on anymore. He jumped for it and reached out with his hand.

Both outstretched hands wove together.

Two lights.

Leerin saw them in the tower of the palace, but it was apparent that they didn't appear in her eyes in their physical form. The image appeared through her right eye.

Twelve lights.

Just what were they? Leerin knew.

The Heaven's Blades.

The twelve pieces of metal held different appearances. They lined up in front of her. Of course, this was just an image in her head.

"Why?"

Why could she see them now? No..... Just like the existence of the Queen who held the absolute power of a Military Aritst, and just like the existence of the right eye that Leerin held that was related to the creation of this world, the Heaven's Blade successors existed in Grendan, so there must be a purpose to them. The existence of Heaven's Blades that made the potential of Heaven's Blade successors into reality was necessary.

Perhaps similar, it held some important meaning just like Leerin's right eye.

But why?

The Queen.

The right eye.

And Heaven's Blades.

The world Saya created.

The moving city that Saya slept in.

The moon.

The cross of thorns.

"..... Uh!"

The sudden pain made her stop thinking. She felt that she understood something, a feeling of almost finding all the pieces of the puzzle only to have to reassemble it again. Remnants of

unhappiness. The pain in her head made her think of something else.

The cross of thorns.

Tho.....rns.

She did see the image of a thorn entering his body when Derek left. What did that mean? The speed of the answer came faster than that of the question surrounding the Heaven's Blades. The answer appeared clearly in her head. Why was the answer so obvious? The answer was simple because its predecessor already existed.

She had chosen her protector subconsciously, and had similarly given him a thorn. Did it happen when he was still a baby, when he was a small child, when he was an adolescent or when he left?

Layfon Alseif.

Leerin subconsciously chose him to be her protector just because Derek happened to pick him up on the same day that he picked her up. The power in her right eye, the cross of thorns, entered Layfon in order to protect the slumbering princess. Layfon held a huge amount of Kei from when he was young. He easily became a Heaven's Blade successor. Living inside him was Airen, the ancestor of all Military Artists, the man who had become the moon to protect this world, the particles from his body that brought Military Artists into existence. It held the same meaning as the thing that generations of the three royal families sought.

Leerin's power made Layfon into a Heaven's Blade successor. Because she had given him the power that was needed to become a Heaven's Blade successor.

Then it was also her responsibility that he was exiled from Grendan. The Queen wouldn't have exiled him for entering the underground matches if he wasn't a Heaven's Blade successor.

In truth, the other Military Artists who participated in underground matches weren't exiled. Leerin felt that Layfon was exiled not because of his participation but because of that tragedy in the Heaven's Blade title match. That was the real reason.

Either way, the ending would have been different had he not become a Heaven's Blade successor. So she didn't want him to get hurt anymore..... But, ah..... But to give Derek the thorn in order not to get Layfon involved..... She couldn't forgive herself even though it wasn't her intention.

She lifted her head as she hated herself. Because of that, she couldn't retreat anymore. She couldn't always be protected. She must do all she could for this desperate situation.

The hand he reached out did tightly grasp hold of it.

The two people used their momentum to brush past each other.

In Layfon's hand was the restored Heaven's Blade. Layfon landed on a creature. The remnants of the Kei flowing through his body shattered the creature and he leapt again.

He had time to confirm the Heaven's Blade in his hand as he jumped.

"Uh!"

The shape was different. He was holding a sharp katana. Wolfstein should have been a sword. No one had taken the title after Layfon. The setting hadn't been cancelled and so the blade should have been a sword. Either way, Wolfstein wouldn't have reacted to Layfon's voice and Kei and restored itself if the setting had been reset.

And this wasn't the only strange thing.

Kei filled with majesty headed for him like a storm. Layfon turned his gaze to it.

Derek was jumping between the gaps of the creatures to him.

He was also holding a katana, and the shape of it was the same as the one in Layfon's hand. Layfon was right. That was a Heaven's Blade. Besides, Derek was releasing more Kei than before. Only a Heaven's Blade could withstand that amount of Kei.

There were two Heaven's Blades?

No. That wasn't possible.

So the katana had split into two just like Savaris' gloves. But why? Layfon had no time to ponder because Derek was in front of him. He raised his katana to block the strike, wielding it as he poured all of his Kei into the blade.

The two Heaven's Blades clashed.

And the remnants of Kei created from this clash destroyed the creatures surrounding them.

He didn't have to confirm it anymore. It was a Heaven's Blade. He didn't understand what was happening but he hated the katana in his hand. This battle would have ended if the Heaven's Blade hadn't appeared.

"No one would acknowledge that half-hearted result!"

Derek's voice echoed in the sky.

"This battle won't end until one side falls. Throw away the katana and leave if you don't want to fight."

Layfon gritted his teeth. The fact that Derek didn't understand his feeling made blood rush up to his head.

But he controlled himself. Father was showing his preparation, showing his all without reservation. He had to defeat him if he were to disobey his father. He couldn't see Leerin if he didn't do that because Father already said he wouldn't let him see her.

Father was prepared to die for his will.

"Wu....."

Layfon could easily shatter his preparation no matter how strong it was, no matter how much it would hurt him if the gap of

strength remained as it was before. But he couldn't do that now. They were even. Both of them held the Heaven's Blade that allowed them to use their Kei without regret.

He would die if he got distracted in this fight.

"Then show me your resolve again."

Derek rushed him.

He raised the katana to receive the strike.

The two jumped from one creature to another. The blades danced in the air. The remnants of their kei annihilated the creatures around them and making them lose their platforms, but they used the remnants to make themselves jump again to another creature, to find a new platform.

And then they clashed once more.

Numerous spaces were opening up in the torrent of creatures falling from Grendan's sky.

A few people thought this was good timing.

To put it correctly, they were Heaven's Blade successors.

"..... Layfon. Who is the other person?"

Ruimei watched the sky. His huge body hadn't moved, but the metal chain that was connected to a metal ball covered the entire area he was responsible for, exuding the light of Kei. The surrounding was shockingly quiet. Creatures continued to rain down in other areas and the Heaven's Blades were dealing with them. The battles were quite tragic yet grand, but that scenery didn't take place here.

Ruimei's chain didn't only cover the ground of the outer edge, it had also sunk inside the monster's body as if it was part of the monster's skin. The first strike of the metal ball had entered the body and left itself in it.

External Kei variation – Lightning Quake.

The metal ball and chain inside the monster's body flowed Ruimei's kei in a rampage. This was destroying the creatures being shot out of the monster's body. Unlike the silence in the surrounding, Ruimei's mad destructive power was eating into the monster.

But one could only say they were on par with each other.

Ruimei turned his gaze back to the monster, but the rough hand patting his chin showed he was thinking of something.

"..... Can't we use him?"

(You're right.)

Delbone's flake replied next to him.

This was what Ruimei was considering.

(Tigris and Barmelin don't have as many to deal with because of the fight in the sky. This is a chance to take action.)

What that fight was about, how it was connected to the current situation, who Layfon was fighting against, all these meant nothing to Ruimei. His current mission was to fight this monster and not to chase after the details of Layfon's battle.

He should take advantage of this if Layfon's fight could make changes in the current situation. This was all he was pondering about.

"Really, I wish that fight were happening near me."

This was all he took notice of.

"Ha? Better to come over to my side than yours."

Cauntia's voice came through the flake. This defensive fight must be boring for her as she specialized in offence. But then, Ruimei was the same.

"You're annoying. For someone who can't fight without Reverse , you've no right to speak."

"What did you say!? Careful else I cut your stomach in half!"

"Come over here if you were to do that."

"Both of you, stop arguing."

Reverse's tension-filled voice that was unlike his usual calm made the two stop arguing. His words in battle were that powerful .

"We have to defeat the monster. It matters not who beats it."

"Exactly."

Kalvan entered the conversation.

"Delbone, have you discovered the enemy's weak point?"

(My flakes situated outside the city can't work because the transmission of Psychokinesis is cut off. I haven't found anything inside the city. I'm afraid the inside of this monster is made of atoms from creatures.)

"Then we have to find it from outside the monster."

Kanaris entered the conversation too.

"We can't change our assigned locations. Then let Tigris or Barmelin make a hole in that monster. There isn't any other way. What do you think about a hole that can remain open for a long period of time?"

(That's good. A thorough investigation will take a minute or so.)

"Let's give this good mission to the young," Tigris said.

"Eh?"

Tigris obviously meant someone else, and that made Barmelin call out in disapproval.

"It's better for you old timers to do this than the creepy guy there."

"Shut up. So annoying."

"What did you say! You filth!"

"Okay okay. Let me do it."

"You shut up!" the two howled together when Troyatte tried to break up the fight.

"A creepy personality has nothing to do with your level of strength," Troyatte said with a bitter smile.

"Leave it to Lintence to keep the hole open, since he's got time."

"..... I'm not just playing around."

"Even so, you can do it right? You're the strongest Heaven's Blade successor."

"....."

Lintence chose silence at this obvious provocation.

"All right. We'll attack the other places. Should that help you out?"

"Unnecessary."

The others chose silence at his displeased reply.

"What is Her Majesty doing?"

(Her Majesty is concentrating. If she didn't accurately give the monster a fatal strike, the rebound and heat of her attack would be too much for the city.)

"That's troublesome."

Troyatte's sigh closed the conversation.

"Then, let's go."

"You annoying old man. Guard me well."

Tigris and Barmelin, who had been continuously shooting Kei bullets and arrows, regulated their breathing. The Heaven's Blade at Barmelin's feet, Swattice, seemed lonely for not getting the chance to be used.

"Ha."

Tigris shot out Meandering Haze to eliminate all creatures in his area.

".....Wu."

Tigris took a step forward and changed his pose when Meandering Haze was swallowing the creatures. He pointed his bow at the sky and pulled his Kei together in an instant.

The light he released became a pillar, running straight through the sky.

External Kei variation – Meandering Haze. Scattered Luster.

Changes occurred to the pillar of light when it reached the air shield. It dispersed just like the meaning of its name, becoming tiny particles of light to swim in the city's city, to capture, chase after the creatures and destroy them. This scenery was playing out in the entire sky.

"Ah, I'm getting old. It took me so much to just make that shot," Tigris complained as he prepared the next arrow. Next to him, Barmelin threw away the guns in her hand, and then she lightly tossed Swattice to the sky. She carried the huge cannon that was about the same height as herself and poured Kei into it. The body of the cannon continued to exude the light of Kei.

The setting was set at the highest level.

A huge pillar of light that didn't lose to Scattered Luster burst through the sky, piercing through the air shield to assault the monster's skin. The heat in the pillar of the light immediately burnt through the skin. The melting and evaporating processes almost happened at the same time, opening a large hole in the monster's

body. Still, the pillar didn't seem to weaken. It pointed straight at the sky and blew away the dark clouds. The huge moon finally appeared in the sky.

The monster, not the dark clouds, regenerated itself as if to cover up the moon.

"Tsk!" Barmelin brushed off the waste heat emitted as a result of firing Swattice. In the midst of that, she popped an adorned chain off herself. The Dite chain restored in mid-air, into a magazine as long as her arm. Catching hold of it, she inserted the magazine into the slit of Swattice. Other than the barrel used for Kei bullets, which was still emitting heat, another barrel that was used for real bullets gleamed dully.

Taking aim at her target, she pulled the other trigger in succession.

The cartridges that were expelled in succession from the cartridge expulsion port danced in the air. The empty magazine was ejected automatically, striking the ground.

As the six cannon rounds that were fired off surged into the atmosphere, they lodged onto the interior of the hole bored earlier, pushing back the regeneration, and were deeply embedded inside. Delayed blast. The broken projectile heads became fragments that were deposited with Kei, and increased the damage sustained inside the monster.

But even with that, it only slowed down the regeneration. The hole kept decreasing in size.

"..... I'm peeved."

Barmelin wasn't happy with the result but she didn't stop her action there. She immediately took up the gun and created a river of bullets.

The shrinking of the hole was stopped once again.

Sharp teeth that one couldn't discern with his naked eyes were destroying the new cells and widening the hole. Lintence's steel threads were preventing the monster from regenerating.

"Even he can't keep this up for long," Tigris said. He didn't look good.

"You annoying old man?" Barmelin couldn't turn around but she didn't like the presence she sensed. All she saw was the big river of bullets, the faint light of the hole that was kept alive by her bullets and Lintence..... Delbone's flakes.

"Please make it work, Delbone," Tigris' words left, following the flakes that disappeared through the hole.

The flakes passed through the hole.

A black haze surrounded the other side of the hole. Filled with dense pollutants, the haze writhed around the monster.

(Next.....)

Delbone activated her Psychokinesis. The flakes spread outside Grendan moved once more. Thousands of flakes drifted in the wilderness, looking down at the monster.

(This is.....)

One couldn't quite tell the scale of the monster just from inside Grendan, but even Delbone, who had experienced huge battles, failed to suppress her shock at the sight she saw outside the city.

Rain wasn't creating the black haze.

It was the monster.

(Seems to be called Durindana.)

It sounded like a woman's name, but one could only call it monster judging from its appearance. The membrane-like thing that covered Grendan wasn't the monster's real body. But just where was it.....

Things that looked like flower buds covered the membrane. They weren't really flower buds but that term was the most suitable looking at the thing's shape. The flower buds seemed to about to bloom any moment. A long neck stretched inside a bug and numerous scales covered the bud. It opened its mouth and roared at the sky like the head of an insect. As if it was threatening the moon.

Such a monster with many heads were swallowing up Grendan.

(One of them must be its weak point.)

Saya, the creator of this world, the true will of Grendan, this monster must have a weak point if her words were right. Saya had prevented the monster from invading the city by strengthening the air shield through her power. Her words were believable. But it was very difficult to find the weak point.

(But we don't have a lot of time.)

One minute. That was the time she had promised the Heaven's Blade successors. She could do it if she used all the flakes outside Grendan to do a thorough investigation.

(Then let's have a try.)

There were ten heads. Just the size of one head was about the size of a filth monster with a name. Delbone would leave one flake above the hole for communication purpose and take all of the remaining flakes close to the head then use the transmission of Psychokinesis to investigate the inside of the monster.

(I hope I can really find the weak point.)

There wasn't much time. She put all of her consciousness on the investigation.

But Delbone had made a mistake.

Or perhaps she had lost the sense of concentration she honed through years because of the emergency. She gave all of her consciousness to Psychokinesis, no, because her body was

deteriorating and her movements were more inconvenient, she had prioritized all of her consciousness to the use of Psychokinesis, including what existed above her consciousness, and if there existed such a thing as a soul, she had given hers to Psychokinesis too.

And so the counter-attack made a heavy impact on her.

"UGRrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!!"

The long neck moved as all ten heads howled. Perhaps Durindana was controlling even the dark clouds in the sky. And then came the lightning.

Numerous spears of lightning landed on the monster's body. Electricity flowed through the monster's skin and chased away Delbone's flakes.

The flakes were all parts of a Heaven's Blade so they weren't damaged, but the impact of the electricity had bounced them away . And this information spread through the flakes, the Psychokinesis to directly assault Delbone's body.

This probably should have been a normal piece of information for an average Psychokinesist. The flow of information would have caused her dizziness and a little bit of pain. It wasn't enough to threaten one's life. It would have been a normal impact for Delbone.

"Wu....."

A patient suffering from a serious illness lay in the sick room in an underground shelter. The old her who had slept many years on the bed moaned. Her hand that was like a withered tree branch pressed down on her chest. Blood flowed on the lips that had lost their radiance.

"What a failure," the old woman said lightly, her own blood becoming the makeup on her lips.

The silence in her mind was a shock to her. Her head had never been so quiet since her fights as a Psychokinesis. Dealing with a huge amount of data was the same as breathing to her.

But this was all gone now.

The lightning had chased away the flakes outside Grendan, and it had also cut off the connection with the flakes inside the city.

The peace was shocking.

The equipments around the bed sounded their siren once they discovered the abnormalities occurring in her body, but she couldn't hear it. The strike was nearly fatal for her whose body function was almost non-existent. She had to rely on Psychokinesis to live her normal life. She had already used up the last bit of her physical strength to talk to Elsmau.

The best physicians in Grendan would arrive in a few more minutes.

But that would still be too late.

Delbone noticed she was close to her death in the silence that she had never felt in the past years. The counter-attack had brought her an impact that her old body couldn't sustain, and so she couldn't even maintain her Psychokinesis with the flakes inside the city. Not just the Heaven's Blades, but the Military Artists who fought behind the line must be in confusion too. Though other Psychokinesists were there to support the rest of the Military Artists, the person who took care of all the information was Delbone.

The Military Artists were unable to fight efficiently without information. Their efficiency to handle the creatures that slipped through the Heaven's Blade successors would lower. Besides, the Heaven's Blades themselves who were in the thick of fighting must be swayed a little by this event too.

"I didn't expect to die in an ordinary way, but I never thought it'd be in this situation."

Delbone wasn't afraid of death. She needed all of her strength just to get down from the bed to see her granddaughter. It wasn't surprising that she cared naught when she was about to die.

But to die when she hadn't finished her mission in this important battle.....

"It can't be helped. Let's persist till the end."

She made the decision and held tightly to her Dite. She couldn't even pour strength into her fingers. Still, her fingers did touch the Heaven's Blade. Just a short period of time. A short period of time was enough even if she couldn't send it to the entirety of Grendan.

There were only two locations for the destinations of her Psychokinesis.

Chapter 5 - To the indecisive person

A large hole had opened up in the sky. Light filtered into the city before Leerin's eyes. It burst through the air shield, through the monster's body to wave away the clouds and reveal the moon. Leerin didn't know this was made by Barmelin's attack. She also didn't know the danger that the Heaven's Blade successors faced afterwards. The battle had taken a sudden turn for the worst.

"..... Delbone."

She heard Alsheyra's light call and saw her eyebrows knotted, but she didn't understand the true meaning behind it. The butterfly shaped flake exuding the faint light of Psychokinesis had fallen next to the feet, lying on the floor like a dead bug. She didn't understand it.

The moon was pulling at Leerin's right eye because it couldn't take the eye from her.

"Ah, ahhhh....." she moaned. But even Alsheyra and the doll-like Saya didn't seem to notice her moans. They didn't turn to her.

Leerin watched the moon in silence.

She saw the moon and the image that the moon saw. The images in her left eye differed from the one in her right. Her visions overlapped because of different images and this made her head hurt. She covered her left eye with her hand and that made the image in her right eye clearer.

This was what the moon saw. The scenery from above Grendan. A monster with many heads was swallowing Grendan into its stomach. The face of the enemy that covered the entire city.

This monster was shaking its long neck as its ten heads roared at her. Lightning fell and hit the monster.

But it wasn't hurt. It kept roaring.

Leerin felt blood loss at the scenery of hatred aimed at her. Her eyes felt shaky. Suddenly, this scenery disappeared into darkness.

When she realized it, the hole in Grendan's sky had closed up once more. The flake was still lifeless beside Alsheyra and Alsheyra's eyes were tightly closed, as if she was enduring something.

Something important had happened, sinking Grendan into a new crisis.

But Leerin understood something. She knew what she wanted to see.

(One more time.)

She begged and watched the sky.

What had turned strange?

Layfon had to put all of his concentration into the fight but even he felt the delicate change in the air. The original tension suffusing the entire city was gone. But this didn't mean the battle had ended because creatures kept raining down in the airspace Layfon was in. The large river that counter-attacked those live-bullets had not stopped.

But something was shaken. A spider's net wouldn't be destroyed even attacked by a furious wind, but the tension of a net being finished had relaxed. The indestructible spider's net was slowly losing its shape.

This was an event that was unbelievable for a battlefield in Grendan. Such an intense change in the air of Grendan had never happened no matter how harsh the battle was, not to mention that all the Heaven's Blade successors were fighting.

Still, just what was happening?

What was it? Where was it happening?

Derek was striking at him with his katana.

Layfon blocked the attack, his external Kei eliminating the live-bullets around him in the process. This scenery had happened countless times already. He couldn't count the number now.

Should he tell father of this change? This consideration ended when he noticed his father's expression as the two blades clashed.

Father had already noticed it.

But he still prioritized Layfon's fight.

Nothing would change his decision. This stubbornness began with Derek and was passed down to Leerin and Layfon. The other siblings must be the same too. So Layfon gave up trying to persuade him. Besides, Layfon felt empty for not knowing what he wanted to be in the future. He could only go with the flow and he wasn't comfortable with that.

It was normal that he felt Nina was very bright for him. Her path was different from his but she had something that he had lost. She wouldn't let go no matter what.

Layfon might have hated her for losing everything if she had taken a wrong step, but he didn't, and he was grateful for that.

The blades kept dancing. External Kei became flashes of light to adorn the sky. The live-bullets also became decorated flowers though their entire bodies were disintegrating. However, both Derek and Layfon ignored them.

Layfon thought this beauty was the most fragile as it turned complete.

The blades hit. Layfon felt the Kei in himself. He felt it too when he fought Savaris and Lintence. Or maybe he was challenging his own limits, the limit of his technique and mental strength, as well as the limit of his Kei. When he fought Savaris it was the limit of the Dites; when he fought Lintence he had to surpass a limit, a limit he could control, the limit of collapse.

And now, he was just challenging his own limits.

Nostalgia filled him being able to fight without reservation. Even though what he held now was only half a Heaven's Blade, it had been his partner for five years. It had been absorbing his Kei and so it felt like a beast was howling in joy at returning to its owner. And similarly, the other half of Wolfstein was joyous at having found a new partner in Derek.

The live-bullets serving as their platforms were destroyed as they jumped from one place to another. The two of them continued to challenge their limits, pouring Kei into their limbs. Layfon didn't need to think anymore. He had endured many fights since small. His body had learned the best Kei skills and techniques after tasting failures, and he used them all automatically.

Layfon had time to think of other things because the actions were too automatic.

And so he also took note of the changes around him, felt the end of the fight even though he didn't know the result would be like. And then he thought something that was even less relevant.

What would he do after surpassing his father?

He had decided to see Leerin. The battle was becoming more chaotic. He didn't know what had happened but he could judge from the air that he might be able to see Leerin more easily than before.

And after meeting her?

He should have already made up his mind. He would listen to her true intention. Did she not need him anymore? Or did she do that for his sake? He wanted to confirm everything. He would save her if he could. He was moving because he had decided, but he was still confused.

He was confused whether his decision was right.

Why did he ask himself this question..... The answer was simple.

(Ah.....)

He didn't make a noise. Even if he did, the sound of metal clashing would have drowned it out.

(I'm still scared of losing.)

This battle was nearing its end though he couldn't clearly see how it would turn out. He felt it ending though and the feeling he had pressed down in his heart because of the pressure before him was floating free.

He knew things wouldn't necessarily happen the way he wanted no matter how prepared he was. He knew the pain he felt wouldn't change no matter how he swore that he would endure her scolds.

He knew he could endure physical pain but not the pain in his heart. He couldn't deny that his tactless thoughts were making him feel down even though he was in a fight with his father. A fight that no one must interfere.

Felli felt the change in the air inside the shelter.

"Something has happened," she said.

Psychokinesis couldn't be transmitted to the outside. The flake following Nina had lost its power after bursting through the monster and leaving Grendan. Felli wanted to follow Layfon but

the speed of the battle was too fast, so fast that even she couldn't catch up. Besides, the rain of creatures and the Kei that was destroying them were also affecting her flake.

Felli couldn't even gather all of the information inside the city and that didn't sit well with her. She was now located at the entrance of a shelter. Inside was a wider space. Felli didn't have the courage to stay there even though the city's citizens and City Police only made a "why are you here" expression at the Dite in her hand. She knew they wouldn't do anything to her, but as an outsider, she wanted to avoid their gaze as much as possible, and so she chose to stay here.

She couldn't only try to grasp hold of the situation since she couldn't catch up with Layfon. She did this and wasn't happy as she realized the battle was taking a worse turn. The Heaven's Blades were still fighting in a way that turned her knowledge of Military Artists upside down. No one would be left alive if these people fought like this in Zuellni. But none of the Heaven's Blade successors or normal Military Artists had died for now.

A delicate crack had appeared in this unusual situation, in this unusual attack and perfect defensive formation. The Heaven's Blades were still fighting strong but a delicate change had occurred. Felli couldn't tell the real reason behind it, but the situation was clear to her. The Heaven's Blades were still perfectly fighting on their own in their assigned locations, but judging from the entire battle formation, cracks were appearing in the conjunctions of assigned areas. One could calculate that.

The number of live-bullets slipping through the Heaven's Blade successors was increasing.

As if the original 100% had become 98%. Even a mere 2% couldn't be ignored, judging from the enormous number of enemies attacking them. The Heaven's Blades made up the first line of defense, and as such, the burden on the second line of defense had increased.

Also, the swaying of the heart of the second line was clearer than that of the first line. It was slowly losing its accuracy in clearing up the live-bullets. This all happened after the Heaven's Blades executed an attack that differed from before. The defensive formation was weakening. This was very clear.

"What is happening, or that....."

Felli didn't want to turn her thought into words. She pressed it down in her heart.

What would happen if this was what she thought it was? She couldn't make a prediction as she wasn't familiar with Grendan, but the shelter she was in was in Grendan. No one would know the next turn of event..... she shook her head. But what to do next .....

"..... As I thought..... I see."

She hadn't noticed the three coming near because she was deep in thought. She continued to gather information as she turned around.

Standing before her were a boy and two girls. All three of them looked younger than her. Two of them seemed to be of similar age while one was younger. Felli had taken these three to the shelter after Layfon saved them. They should already be in the middle area of the shelter.

".....Ah."

Toby made an awkward expression at being found out.

"Ok, this isn't the time for that, let's return."

Rainetta, the girl who was of the same age as him, pulled at his sleeve.

"....."

"Hehe."

Felli didn't know what to do so she only watched her silently.

"Uh, are you from Zuellni?"

"Ah, yes," Felli answered Anri speculatively, not knowing what would happen, but it was certain that her confusion wasn't shown on her face.

Anri smiled at her with her child-like innocent smile, and then tossed her a bomb.

"Are you Layfon-Nii's girlfriend?"

"What!"

"Because Toby-Nii said it's not possible for Leerin-Nee to win with such a beautiful person next to him."

"Hey! Don't push that onto me!"

"To- but you did say it."

"Um.... I was only saying."

"So is that true?"

Felli couldn't think of an answer in the face of the girl's naive question.

"Well....."

"So it's true!?" Anri's expression turned complicated. Expectation and discomfort showed on her face, but the feelings of the other two weren't so obvious. Toby was full of expectation and discomfort was heavier on Rainetta's face.

But, no, that wasn't it. Felli wasn't confirming Anri's question with a "well". She was only using it for the rest of her answer.

"Well, how is Layfon-Nii? As a boyfriend? Have you dated? Kissed?"

"Well..... No....."

Felli felt she must resolve this misunderstanding. That was how she felt, but she couldn't say anything in front of the expectant Anri.

"Well....."

So what happened next was like a savior to her.

(Sorry for interrupting when you're so happy.)

The sudden voice made them all turn their gazes to it. A butterfly-shaped flake. She remembered it.

"Ah, Delbone-sama," Anri said.

(Hello, little girl.)

"Hello to you too."

(I'm sorry for interrupting your happy moment. I've something to say to this Nee-san. Could you lend her to me first?)

"Sure!"

(Such a good answer.)

Anri smiled at Delbone's praise and returned to Toby's side.

(If possible, I wish to turn this conversation voiceless.)

(I understand.)

Felli replied immediately.

Psychokinesists could converse without making a noise. Their words would directly appear in one's head.

(Because there isn't much time left, so I'll say this directly.....)

(Is this related to you disappearing from the battlefield.....)

(Uh, yes.)

Felli felt her smile of praise through Delbone's Psychokinesis.

(Just a small failure. It made a huge impact on my body. I probably only have two to three minutes left. My heart has stopped but I can keep my consciousness.)

Felli couldn't imagine what it was like to be so relaxed at facing death.

(..... Then, what do you want with me in this hour?)

She regulated her feeling and continued speaking. She mustn't lose time because of her own shaky heart and doubts, as there wasn't much time left for Delbone.

(I hope you can finish my unfinished duty. I've prepared the compensation too. There's some information in the flake before you. That's your compensation.)

(This is?)

(My battle experience till now. I've turned it into data. I won't tell you the way to read it though the data is about to finish moving to this new location. If you could read the information, it wouldn't be hard for you to learn of the thing in it.)

(That kind of thing.)

(Please, can you help?)

(Do you think I can do this on my own?)

(Perhaps you're far better than all Psychokinesists in Grendan just by your ability. But your experience is lacking and so to fill out for your inexperience, there's one more person.....)

Delbone's flake had also appeared next to that person.

(Grandmother.)

Elsmau, who was in a sickroom the same shelter as Delone had also sensed the flake in the ceiling through her own Psychokinesis.

(It seems I can't give you enough time to consider.)

Delbone's regret could be felt through her data.

(Then, as I thought.....)

Elsmau was the same as Felli, gathering information through her Psychokinesis. She couldn't not do anything probably because she had been through many battles while she was with the Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang.

(Her Majesty has to personally give you the Heaven's Blade, but I can reset the Kei fingerprint immediately. I've already set it for you after I die. If it's you, you should be able to activate the Heaven's Blade from a distance using the Light Dite.)

(But.....)

(I'm sorry. There's no time for confusion. The new you under the bandages has inherited the name of the third daughter's husband, Fora. You're already Grendan's Psychokinesist, and from this moment on, you've become a successor, the next Heaven's Blade successor.)

Fermaus' expression was helpless underneath the bandages. She had finished the operation before moving to this shelter, the operation of skin transplant. One would feel tragic just by looking at her even though her body managed to survive in the exposure of pollutants. She had removed the skin that could endure the death-causing pollutants and changed into new skin.

A Heaven's Blade successor had existed who once had changed his brain and Kei vein. That Heaven's Blade stood in battle on the

day his brain died. Grendan's medical skill development had sustained him, and so it wasn't difficult for this skill to make the skin transplant possible.

But Elsmau couldn't leave the sickbed yet.

(..... My level of Psychokinesis isn't at grandmother's level.)

(You don't have to be like me. You know your own strength and limits. All you need is do it the way you think is best. And I've prepared the ability in order to solve this situation. She will fill up your weaknesses and you too are to fill up her weaknesses.)

A figure appeared in Fermaus' mind when Delbone said "her". The Psychokinesist that she met in Zuellni. She knew she was in Grendan. Perhaps Delbone was conversing with her now. Fermaus admired her grandmother for being so capable even though she was about to die.

(I understand.)

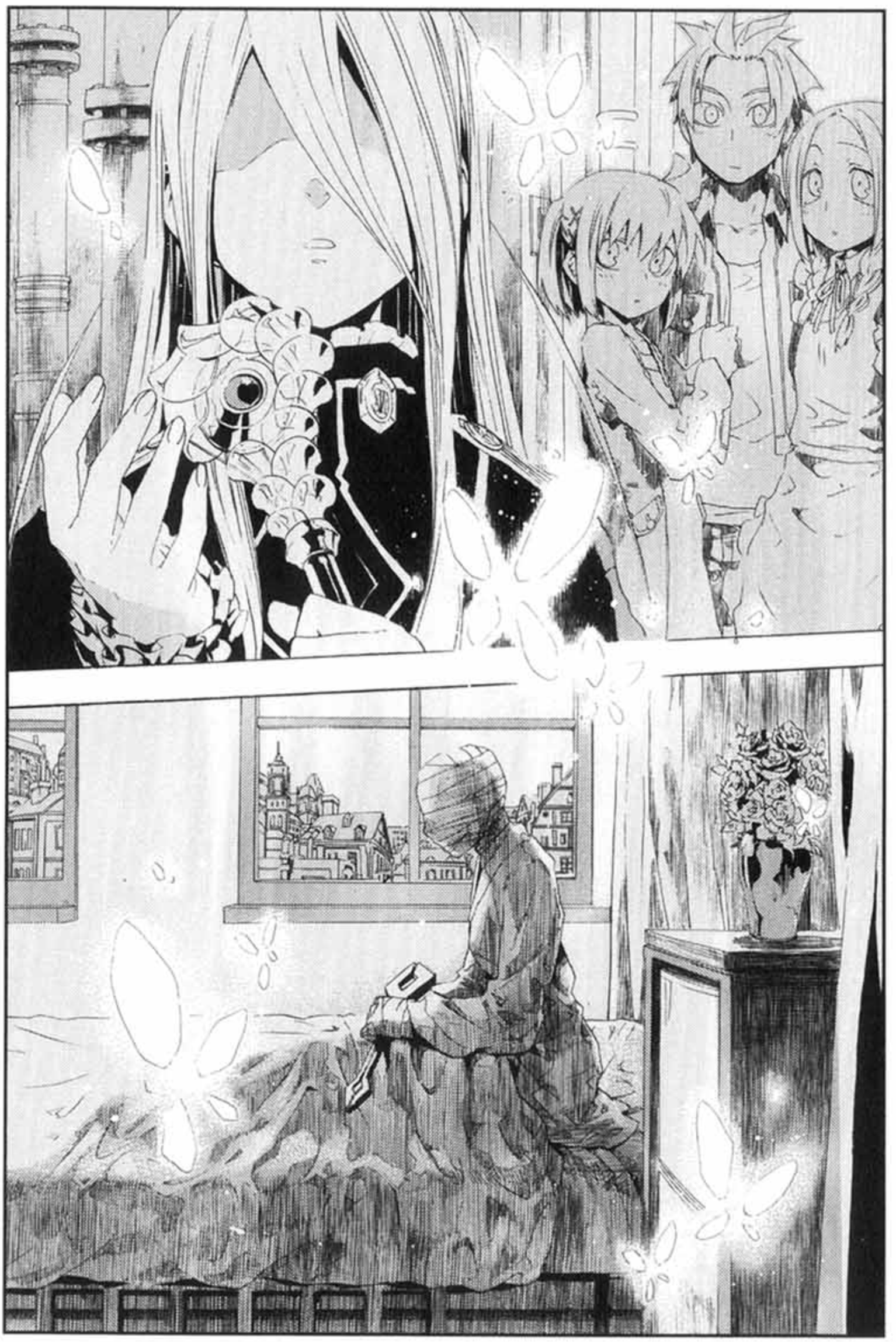
She couldn't return to the Mercenary Gang anymore. The Fermaus in the Mercenary Gang had died. Then let her accept her new life.

(Then from this moment on, I'm Elsmau Quantis Fora. I'll inherit everything from you.)

(Then I'm leaving everything to you, Elsmau Quantis Fora.)

Delbone seemed to pronounce the name with gritted teeth.

Felli accepted the request at the same time.



(I understand.)

(You've saved us. Then.....)

Felli touched her own flake to Delbone's under Delbone's instruction. The flake must be transmitting the information, but it was shocking quick. It only took a split second to finish.

Felli felt something different in her head. Perhaps it was Delbone's information. She could tell where the information was just by concentrating, and the doubt in her vanished during the process.

(Then I'm leaving it to you.)

Some other noise was mixed in with the words in Felli's head.

Because the conversation was voiceless, Felli felt Delbone's concentration was now on something behind her.

Standing in a distance behind Felli were the three boy and girls. Anri waved when she saw Felli look at them.

(I've been watching this city for a long time. In it are happiness, sadness, anger, amusement, confusion, argument, joy, blessing, fortune, misfortune, failure and strength. Things that exist and don't exist no matter where it is. Even this city is just a normal city. There are people living in it.)

Even a little girl like Anri would greet Delbone enthusiastically after seeing her flake. This meant Delbone had been constantly protecting the city through Psychokinesis.

(No matter how you decide to live, it'll never change that you are you. But whether you can see the value of being yourself is up to you.)

(.....)

(I've lived a very good life.)

When Felli turned around, the butterfly-shaped flake lost its radiance to fall into Felli's hand.

She ran as she looked at the monster's figure. She watched Grendan being swallowed and heard the voice of the gigantic monster with man heads. She saw the thin haze drifting beside her , heard the monster's howl at the moon, saw the lightning that fell like decoration on the monster's body.

"A guy you can't joke around with," Sharnid swallowed at the scenery. He didn't know what to say.

Nina was the same.

But she couldn't stand here and space out because she came back to Zuellni by leaving behind Layfon and Felli. She must protect Zuellni from this monster before Zuellni could move again.

But the monster hadn't attacked Zuellni till now.

"Anyway, I can't let down my guard....."

But she couldn't see they were safe. Either way, it was the truth that they were in a crisis and Zuellni couldn't move.

She must confirm the situation with the Student President.

And so she had been running and she moved her gaze away from the monster. The Student President should be in the shelter, or Nina probably thought that Zuellni's Psychokinesists would find her if she kept running.

This expectation soon became reality.

(Nina, it's good you're safe.)

It was Vance's voice.

"Military Arts Head? Where are you?"

The Psychokinesist controlling the flake replied instead and told her the location. She would see it once she went passed the bridge.

(We'll leave the details till you get here.)

"Roger."

Nina nodded put her concentration back on running.

Once could still see some of the sunlight even though a thin layer of dark cloud covered Zuellni's sky. The gray sky looked peaceful. Next to Nina was the city's leg that was destroyed in the fight against the aged phase filth monster. The city's self-repair system was doing its work, but the progress had only made it up several levels. The vine-like things stretching out from where the leg broke off must function like a human being's nerves. It hurt just to look at it.

Nina's chest hurt.

Zuellni was a terrible state but she herself went chasing after the unknown.

"I mustn't allow any more harm to Zuellni," she said to herself and felt more strength in her legs.

Vance was at a location much further away from the outer edge. The buildings destroyed by the giants hadn't been repaired yet. Vance and the others were hiding behind the skeletons of the buildings, using them as the last defensive line.

"We've tried to understand the situation on the other side," Vance immediately answered her question. "Our flakes had tried infiltrating but had failed. We haven't found any areas for infiltration. That monster is covering the entire city, not leaving any cracks."

Vance's words carried a sense of abandonment. But this couldn't be helped. Those giants who attacked the city were already outside one's knowledge base. This time the event was even more incredible. On the other hand, it was commendable that he didn't give up his command but was calmly arranging the defense of the city and giving out commands. And it was commendable for those Military Artists who didn't run away but chose to stay behind to protect this place.

"Gorneo and the others have returned, but that became like that after they returned, so no one knows the situation in Grendan."

"Gorneo and the others were in Grendan?"

She didn't know about that, but Grendan was Gorneo's home city, so he must have his own reason for entering Grendan.

"Uh, those two have exhausted much of their strength. You were there too. How's the situation?"

Nina told him what she knew. Vance and the other Military Artists didn't look good at the beginning of her narrative. Their expressions turned worse as her narrative progressed.

"..... It seems it isn't a situation we can do anything with....." Vance pressed his forehead with a hand as if to relax his headache.

"But we can't do nothing."

"I know, but if what's happening in Grendan happens here, we've no strategy against it."

Nina didn't have any good strategies too. All she had was the strong resolve to protect Zuellni. She would keep on fighting even if she was the only person left. But this resolve wasn't a good strategy.

"All we can do now is pray the people of Grendan can defeat this monster."

Zuellni had no future if they couldn't defeat it. Everyone understood this ending. And Nina knew she shouldn't say anything reckless when they had no strategies, but she wouldn't lose out in air.

This was simple. She had been holding tightly to this simple thing. She didn't feel regret for the effort she put into becoming stronger, but she somehow felt that a part of her had gone lazy if she kept holding onto this simple thinking.

But there was no change to what she should be doing.

She would obey her will and keep on fighting no matter how desperate the situation was.

No matter how strong she had become, what she could do now was about the same as the time when the larvae attacked the city. They might have won the battle without Layfon at the cost of many sacrifices, but they won without any casualties because Layfon was here. Could Nina become the Layfon back then?

She asked herself. What would the power of the Haikizoku do to that monster?

And what was Layfon doing now?

They had lost contact with him after Layfon left for the orphanage. Felli hadn't told them anything. Nina didn't think he would die, but then she had just seen his defeated self. And right now, she couldn't contact Felli.

So she must protect Zuellni. She must protect it so Layfon and Felli could return to it.

Leerin.....

They let Nina go after she told them the information she had. Even if they were to hold a strategic meeting, all Nina's information did was tell them how appalling this monster was.

Nina sat on the debris and watched Grendan. What good way was there to defeat this monster? But she couldn't come up with a conclusion. She was only losing her time.

What appeared in her heart was her desire and worry to save Layfon and Felli and about Leerin. She had to save her if Leerin didn't return to Grendan out of her own free will. But she didn't feel she had the right to do this. Leerin was her friend, but she came to Zuellni for Layfon, and so Layfon should be the one saving her. Either way, she herself..... Nina couldn't do it. In that case, she should prioritized protecting Zuellni.

This was all she could do even if the event unfolding before her was related to the survival of this world.

"But....."

She held tightly to the flake in her hand and looked at the monster.

(Nina Antalk?)

The voice from the flake jolted her awake. This wasn't Vance's voice.

"Student President?"

The owner of the voice was Karian.

"..... I'm sorry. Felli...."

(I've heard the gist of it from Vance. Never mind that. Excuse me, can you come down to the Mechanical Department immediately?)

"Uh?"

She thought Karian would be more worried about Felli, but then she remembered that he wasn't one to take of his personal things first in a crisis. Besides, she was keen on his reason behind his request.

"Did anything happen?"

It was Nina's first time to hear the voice of an Electronic Fairy when she had a dream in Grendan. Zuellni's voice. Did anything happen to her?

(Just head over first.)

The flake left after that.

Nina was thinking of leaving too, but now she really had to leave. Sharnid was with Dalshena and Naruki who were waiting for their injuries to heal. Nina greeted them and then left by herself .

That place wasn't that far for the feet of a Military Artist. Nina arrived at it and entered the Mechanical Department. There were students there fixing up the place. The heat inside was much hotter than better.

"You're here."

Karian walked out of the restroom that the cleaners of the Mechanical Department used as a changing room. Sweat beaded in Karian's face. The same silvery hair that Felli had was stuck on his face. He must have spent his time watching the students repair the place.

His expression looked worse than his face.

"Student President. Are you ok?"

"I'm fine....."

It seemed he would collapse any moment. This heat, plus he wasn't a person of physical strength. Usually he was very busy, and then one crisis happened after another. His mental and physical strength must be close to the limit.

"You should rest a bit."

"No. Everything will be fine if we can overcome this crisis. I can't collapse at this time."

"But....."

"Compared to me, there's something you've to worry about"

Nina didn't know why he called her over, but since she was here, that reason must be extraordinary.

"Did anything happen to Zuellni?"

"She returned to the Mechanical Department after conversing with me."

"Eh?"

Conversing with Zuellni?

"Just......."

"Go. You'll understand."

Karian's face was pale. Was his paleness not related to his exhaustion? But what did he hear from Zuellni?

Nina slowly entered the central area with a big bundle of doubts. She had entered this area before when Melnisc caused Zuellni to go on a rampage. Though she only knew of the existence of the Wolf Faces from Dixerio, or one could say she contacted the strange changes of this world when she leapt through cities, but it all happened after she entered the central area.

The three children chosen by the cruel fate.

That was what Schneibel said. As the mother, the prototype, she would call all other Electronic Fairies "children", then she must be referring to Electronic Fairies. And the ones who were with her at that time were Grendan, Melnisc and Zuellni.

Was Zuellni burdened with a cruel fate too? Wasn't she an Electronic Fairy of an Academy City, a city that nurtured the young? No. Things weren't that simple. Nelphilia held the same appearance as Saya, the original of Electronic Fairies. The beautiful girl who seemed to call forth disaster. She was in Zuellni before. Perhaps everything was related to that.

Nina's feet halted. She had arrived at her destination.

There was a huge gem before her, a gem that hadn't undergone any processing. Connected to it were large machineries and tubes. This was where the Electronic Fairy lived. The soul of the Regios.

Zuellni existed in this gem of unknown color.

"..... Why?"

Nina felt nostalgia when she saw her. Though she was more familiar with this Zuellni, she had yet to adapt to this sudden change.

But this only took a split second. Nina immediately noticed and understood the reason behind the change.

"Zuellni....."

The Electronic Fairy smiling in the gem wasn't the grown form that appeared after contacting with Falnir. This was the form of a little girl that Nina first knew.

"Why!?"

Zuellni smiled in the gem and didn't reply. She had never communicated with words, just like the many times when she met Nina, and so Nina shouldn't be feeling any nostalgia even though Zuellni wasn't saying anything.

But Nina had heard of her voice. She heard of Zuellni's voice when she was in Lance Shelled city.

And Karian had also had some special contact with Zuellni. And so why wasn't she answering?

(My owner. Zuellni is very weak right now. Please don't force her.)

Melnisc answered instead.

"Very weak?"

Why?

No, this couldn't be helped. The city's leg was broken. It couldn't even move. Perhaps Nina had made a wrong conclusion. Zuellni was the city's consciousness. A consciousness without a body. The city itself was the Electronic Fairy's body, and the Electronic Fairy was like the soul of a human being. Though it wasn't sure whether humans had souls, the city did have it, and that was the Electronic Fairy.

The body was busy repairing the leg, and so Zuellni must be pouring the Regios' strength into the damaged area. So it was understandable that she had weakened.

(That isn't the only reason, Master.)

Melnisc's meaning clearly put her in the wrong.

"So what happened?"

(Did that girl in dark clothes not tell you? There's no place to retreat to.)

"So....."

(This is what she meant. An equivalent price is needed to overcome a difficulty. This is what you have to have, and so you were called.)

"So....."

(Merciful Electronic Fairy. You have accepted me who went insane because of madness, who almost stepped on the dangerous path of self-destruction. This is what your existence is like. As long as you live, my spirit remains self-sacrificing. You accept those who are confused no matter what will happen. You give guidance to those who don't know their future. This is what your existence is like, and so the Academy City is more suitable for you than any other cities.)

Zuellni smiled, giving off a faint light. But was she commending him? If you looked at this from another angle? He was calling her stupid for sacrificing herself.

"So just what is going on?" Nina howled. "Why is Zuellni this weak?"

Because the city had come across this situation? Or was there another reason? Why did Zuellni turn back into a girl?

Zuellni's expression turned heavy. She didn't say anything.

(The power obtained from Falnir, Falnir had anticipated the intense battle afterwards and so deliberately transferred it to Zuellni so Zuellni could be reborn.)

Melnisc's voice echoed in place of Zuellni's.

(But Zuellni didn't do it. She gave the power to the one who wanted to walk her own path. Zuellni paid her own price in order to help that person move forward.)

"....."

Nina was speechless. The person who wanted to walk her own path. The price. The girl in the color of black had no path to retreat to.

Nina couldn't still not understand. She wasn't this clumsy.

But she wished she was a bit clumsier at this point because it would lessen her feeling of guilt, because the guilt in her chest was about to shatter her chest.

But she had to accept this pain. If she didn't do this, she would have lost to Dixerio in that fight and had her memory taken. She would have become a person not understanding anything. She would have only suffered for feeling impotent.

But regardless, she still felt painful for her own impotence now.

"Was this all because of me?"

There were two Dites in her weapon harness. They had been destroyed some time during the battle but for some reason they had been repaired. The reborn Dites were enough to endure the Haikizoku's power.

"Zuellni, you....."

Zuellni had used Falnir's power to make these two iron whips for her.

For Nina.

It didn't matter to her even if she were to sink into danger.

"Was it because of me that this situation....."

Zuellni couldn't move because of her, and thousands of students were to face the crisis of death.

"This..... Isn't what an Electronic Fairy should do."

Nina couldn't stop her shoulders from shaking with anger and sadness. The Electronic Fairy had chosen to resolve one person's crisis rather than save thousands of people. This was unforgivable.

"Will things be solved if I return this power?"

(That is not possible. A power that has been materialized cannot return to its original form.)

"Is there no way out?"

(Haven’t you been warned?)

"Ah....."

Everything was too late. Too late to begin anew. Zuellni was in a dilemma. The monster was concentrating on Grendan now but it would turn its destructive power to Zuellni after Grendan fell.

Nina herself had caused Zuellni's current crisis.

(.....This is from Zuellni.)

Nina was afraid of Melnisc's words.

Zuellni maintained her smile in the gem, but Nina didn't dare look directly at the figure. She blamed herself, but she hadn't thought of suicide. She stood between life and death at that time. If she had lost her memory she would have forgotten all that she had walked through. The person she was living as now would have vanished, and this was the same as death in a certain way.

Nina didn't want to commit suicide.

(Have you found it? That was what she said.)

"Found it?"

Found what?

No. No. Not like that.

Nina wasn't viewed as someone involved at that time in the dream of Grendan. She had no authority to decide anything. She was just caught in the mess by Dixerio, possessed by Melnisc and arrived at that place by following the flow. She had no authority to

decide anything. Sheniebel was only considering Melnisc's feeling and hadn't asked Nina anything.

As if Nina was just a tool.

And she was angry about that.

Her own feeling was ignored in the battle against Dixerio. Nina couldn't comprehend his theory, and he wanted to unreasonably take away her memories.

Nina only felt infuriated. She only felt infuriated towards Sheniebel and Dixerio. In anger, she had chosen to walk her current path and refused to forget her past self. And she had allowed Zuellni to come to danger for the sake of her own anger.

"Have you found it?"

Have you found the path you should take?

This was Zuellni's question.

"That kind of thing....."

She couldn't understand.

She was angry when she was in Grendan, as if the tools for drawing could only draw in black in her heart. She got caught in the mystery of this world but she wasn't allowed to do anything about it. Everything made her feel very angry. She felt she had to do something no matter what.

But her anger was reduced after she met up with Layfon and the others and had a discussion with them. Not that she wasn't angry but that anger had become more tolerable.

And right now, the effect of that anger was spread out before her.

She didn't understand what she had to do now.

"Only..... Only a little. I've decided."

She was full of regret. She felt like vomiting for unknowingly carrying such a heavy burden.

Even so, she had to keep moving forward. She would not give up the burden and escape her responsibility.

"I'll protect you. I'll take away your discomfort no matter what happens, no matter what we encounter and no matter what the battle is like."

She didn't know if Zuellni was satisfied with her answer but she had decided. She would have returned to Zuellni when she knew of Zuellni's act even if she had stayed in Grendan. If she was in Grendan, she would have regretted more. She didn't understand the purpose of her existence. It was better if the mystery of the world remained far away. Nina couldn't give up what existed before her eyes.

She had nothing else to do even if the future direction turned out differently.

Zuellni was smiling.

Though she didn't know if this smile was acknowledging, Nina felt her burden had lightened.

What could she do for Zuellni? She must act after thinking on it. She must act no matter whether the action was the right one.

(Captain, can you hear me?)

She heard Felli's voice again when she returned to the outer edge once more.

Time turned back to just a while ago. Just a little while before Delbone contacted Felli.

The Heaven's Blade successors were in chaos.

"Hey, what's going on?"

"What's the strategy? Has she found the enemy's weak point?"

"Hey hey, old woman, this isn't the time to joke."

"What's the situation? Hurry up with the report!"

Voices filled with frustration swept through the outer edge area, but this voice failed to reach the other's ears. The flakes beside them remained silent and helpless on the ground.

The Psychokinesists were still here. They also heard the Heaven's Blade successors' voice but they couldn't believe their senses. Delbone was dead. No, in Delbone flowed the same blood as theirs. Delbone was like a grandmother to them. She was their idol. For such a person to suddenly die, they couldn't calmly accept it, handle it and analyze it. Either way there were too many Psychokinesists who were blood related kin of Delbone's. They were shocked at having lost their pillar of spirit and strength. This feeling was overlapped with sadness for having lost the person they loved, and this was attacking the Psychokinesists.

The Heaven's Blade successors were confused for having lost the information. They could only protect their assigned area with the strength that they were so proud of. But the holes in the boundaries between these areas were increasing and this meant the number of enemies that could move around freely in the city was also rising.

They were the strongest Military Artists in this world.

But their real substance was a soldier's.

They had been assigned to the battlefield and had been fighting according to the situation itself, but they didn't have the ability to grasp hold of the directions of every soldier and command them accordingly.

Delbone was the most suitable to command judging from her ability and so she had been doing this job. The Heaven's Blades couldn't complete their mission now that they had lost her. Cracks had appeared in their coordination after losing Delbone. The cracks were even larger than what Felli was sensing. The live-bullets pierced through these cracks and accurately appeared in front of the Military Artists.

The live-bullets that had successfully entered the city were like the one that appeared at the orphanage. They were like bugs that opened their legs and unfolded their wings. Something that looked like an egg grew on the soft looking part of the body, and another creature crawled out of the egg that was then split out. Every live-bullet carried around 20 to 30 of these things. This meant ten live-bullets in the city would create around an army of 200 skeletons.

One hundred live-bullets were two thousand.

One thousand live-bullets were twenty thousand.

Though an individual skeleton didn't mean a lot to Grendan's Military Artists, the increasing number of live-bullets that slipped through the Heaven's Blades' defense would eventually gather up when the city's assaulting speed slowed down.

The army of skeletons led by the huge bugs, those that the Military Artists had failed to destroy continued to increase in number and at last formed a huge organization numbering more than one thousand. They began to ignore the attacks of the Military Artists as they headed straight for their goal.

The center of the city.

Their goal was Grendan's palace.

And the Heaven's Blade successors didn't know this was happening behind their backs. Only Barmelin and Tigris, the two who were shooting down the live-bullets from inside the city, had noticed the changes.

"This is getting troublesome."

Tigris had a difficult expression on his face. The army of skeletons was forming small groups in their progress under the standing point of the tall building that Tigris was on. If groups were also forming in other places then the number of enemies wouldn't be just one thousand but over ten thousand. Though the Military Artists were battling the newly formed groups, the situation would still be very bad if the number was over ten thousand. There wouldn't be any ways to stop them if they cared nothing for their fallen comrades.

"It seems they plan to defeat the Queen, such a bold move."

Of course, Tigris wasn't worried about the Queen's safety. It was not possible for the Queen to die, but she would get distracted when trying to defeat this group of monsters. Right now, she was concentrating on using the smallest and most accurate amount of Kei to destroy the huge monster. It was very difficult for her to control her huge amount of Kei. The Heaven's Blades were the same. The lowest bar for the Heaven's Blade successors was that they couldn't fully exhibit their large amount of Kei without their Heaven's Blades. And the Queen's Kei far surpassed theirs.

The city would sustain a fatal injury if she casually attacked with her full strength.

"But the other side would win if we can't defend comfortably."

This was true.

The Heaven's Blade successors and the Queen were all very strong, so strong that they could laugh at the Military Artists of any city.

But this didn't mean they weren't human.

Their bodies would be exposed to the pollutants if this city was destroyed. They would die once they inhaled a certain amount of pollutants in the sky. If the army of skeletons managed to interrupt the Queen's concentration and she then attacked recklessly and ended up destroying the city too. The Heaven's Blade successors that were fighting in this dilemma on the defense line had no time to resolve this crisis.

No. Maybe they could.

But this was a very dangerous bet. The Heaven's Blade successors could give up defending and instead, used an attack that far surpassed this monster's regeneration ability to completely annihilate it. But it wasn't possible to estimate the amount of time needed for this strategy to work.

And the city would sustain the greatest harm in the time of the Heaven's Blades giving up their defense.

To kill or be killed. Should they risk it? Even the Heaven's Blades were hesitating, not to mention the ordinary citizens of the city.

But the person who had reached her limit had appeared beside Tigris.

"AHHHHHHHHHHHH!" Barmelin howled. "So annoying. Super annoying! Go die. Die in pieces!"

"Idiot. Don't do something stupid!"

But it was too late. Barmelin tossed away the cannons in her hands, took up her Heaven's Blade Swattice and shot out a pillar of light. One shot after another. Each shot punched a hole in the monster that was covering Grendan and allowed the people in the city to glimpse the outside.

"Really!"

Tigris forced himself again to protect the area she had abandoned. Layfon's fight was destroying quite a number of live-bullets in the sky but that was only one part of many places. It wasn't complete.

External Kei variation – Meandering Haze. Scattered Luster.

Tigris' arrows instantly smothered Grendan's sky.

This was the action he took alone to protect his and Barmelin's areas. Either way, his move only worked for a few minutes. Barmelin, who had gone on a rampage, continued to shoot pillars of light at the monster during this time. Numerous holes opened in the monster's body and sealed up again, but other new holes then appeared. This scenario repeated itself again and again. But this was the same as doubling Tigris' burden, and this burden wasn't lifting. Tigris had confidence he could keep up with it, but he wasn't so sure now that his burden was increasing.

Was it the burden on his spirit?

No. His body.

Perhaps this was the first fatal weakness in the coordination of the Heaven's Blade successors. This weakness appeared because they had lost Delbone, their commander.

The defensive formation was losing shape. Barmelin lacked self-control in her attack. Tigris' body was reaching its limit because of his old age.

"Uurgh."

The limit came after shooting a few more shots. Intense pain came from the Kei vein around his back, and it was running through his organs because of a chain reaction. The elder vomited blood.

"Old man!?"

"Quick. Stop. We can't destroy the balance of the defense."

It already took most of his strength to say those words. In the next moment, he pushed Barmelin away, sending her flying.

"Ah!"

The defensive line collapsed above them. The live-bullets fell to attack the two of them. Tigris had no more strength left to avoid them.

"Old man!" Barmelin said as she restored her cannons to stop the live-bullets' invasion.

"Tsk!"

The buildings around them were destroyed in the split second that the rain of bullets fell. Barmelin was moving as she tried to find a new standing point, shooting continuously with the cannons and defending.

"Old man!" she said as she moved.

But Tigris had not climbed out of the debris no matter how many times she called.

The other Heaven's Blade successors couldn't have not noticed this change. But they didn't do anything. All they could do now was increase their area of protection even if just by a little. None of them wanted to scold Barmelin. They might have done the same thing as her.

"Damn. Does this mean two down?" Ruimei howled in anger. The other Heaven's Blades too. Delbone's mission had failed and death would come.

And Tigris had faced death just then. He had confidence to hold out for a few more days if he was only shouldering his own burden, but the live-bullets slipping through the creaks were becoming a number that the Military Artists behind him failed to handle. This was already happening.

"We can only do this now."

"No."

Reverse stopped the impatient Cauntia.

"This isn't the time to bet with such a risk."

"But we'll all be eliminated if this continues. We'll all die."

"....."

Reverse gritted his teeth under the mask at his lover's sigh.

"Be patient. You must be patient! We can only be patient now! Psychokinesists! How much longer are you going to space out! You must act now that Delbone-sama is not here!" Kalvan shouted.

"Ah, really..... This is bad." Troyatte's lips twisted because of his teasing smile. The balls of light that burnt the sky continued to expand.

"Psychokinesists! Hurry and report!" Sadness coloured Kanaris' dance.

"....." Lintence lit a cigarette in silence. "I see, so this is hell, " he said in a low voice as he breathed out thin, green smoke. The cigarette turned into pieces after he held it tightly in his palm. Lintence took a step forward.

(Ah, you people are so noisy.)

A faint voice filled with disapproval echoed throughout Grendan.

He noticed it. The flake that had fallen helplessly on the ground and was blown far away by his attack now exuded a faint light and returned to his side.

Delbone's flake had taken back its light.

But the voice coming from it was not Delbone's,.

"Who are you?" Ruimei asked.

The other Heaven's Blades heard this question too. The network supported by Psychokinesis had returned. He had never heard of this voice from the Psychokinesists that he knew. There wasn't a clue in his brain of the owner of this voice.

This voice sounded young. It wouldn't be strange that the voice belonged to a young person, but then it wasn't strange for him to take note of person with strength that could overtake another's flake.

(Is it important who I am? Compared to that, what's with this tragic scene when you're all a group of adults? Can't you shut up and do what you should be doing?)

The voice coming through the flake was faint but it had clearly hit the faces of the Heaven's Blades.

"You....." Ruimei said with gritted teeth.

(Sorry. Please excuse us.)

The voice after that was also faint but it was clearly filled with worry. It wasn't that girl before, but a voice of a more mature woman.

(I'm Elsmau Fora, a person who has inherited Delbone-sama's Heaven's Blade, Quantis. The official procedure hasn't been completed, so please treat this as a brief ceremony in the special circumstance that is the war.)

There was a need to provide necessary information in this situation though everyone else was a bit flustered.

(First allow me to report to you the current situation. There are around ten thousand and five hundred enemies that have infiltrated Grendan and they are heading straight for the palace. The defensive line has been spread out but it's only a matter of time before it collapses. And the death of Heaven's Blade successors Delbone-sama and Tigris-sama has also been confirmed .)

Two Heaven's Blade successors had died.

Silence fell to them after this notice.

(The battle resumes.)

The girl's voice once again shattered the silence.

(Heaven's Blade successors are to continue to maintain this situation. Break through one point and investigate the monster's weakness.)

"Who will open the hole?" Cauntia asked.

"It's already hard enough to maintain this situation. The number of enemies will increase in the city if we show any more weaknesses."

(Another person has already been selected to replace your lack of strength.)

"What did you say!?"

(As I said, you only need to do what you have to with your most effort. You are not children anymore. Don't complain and just follow orders.)

"Don't you get ahead of yourself....." Ruimei howled but a voice drowned him out. It was laughter.

"Ahhahahahaha! Great. No. Incredible. Ahhahaha! You're right. We're shamed."

The laughter came from Troyatte.

"Troyatte!"

Troyatte ignored Ruimei's reproached and continued to laugh.

"As she said, old man. We're all adults. How long are we to fiddle around for? If you're feeling like a child being scolded, then show her that you're the adult."

"Um....."

"You're right. Let's believe in that person," Reverse said.

"Tsk, fine."

Ruimei nodded reluctantly.

Everyone else also followed Reverse's suggestion.

"Hey, don't take all the good things yourself."

"Uh? Ah, sorry."

"My Reverse is a real good man compared to you. Of course!" Cauntia said happily.

"So noisy," Barmelin said.

(Annoying adults.)

That voice had been faint from start to finish, and that was how it was left to the adults.

She sighed deeply in the shelter.

It was Felli.

(They're the Military Artists with the highest status in Grendan. You should have respected them more.)

(I'd give them however much you want if that can change the current situation.)

Felli answered Elsmau's complaint coldheartedly. She was surprised that Elsmau was Delbone's successor and the Psychokinesists, Fermaus, of the Salinvan Mercenary Guidance Gang. She was also surprised that she was female. Felli never thought this would happen.

Felli's experience was rich as a Psychokinesist. Elsmau's Psychokinesis interfered with her and rendered her helpless when Haia captured her. Felli had never stomached that part down.

But this time she had to put aside her anger, surprise and regret. She should concentrate everything on the crisis before her.

(But do you think your strategy would work?)

(We'd only encounter the same result if we did it the same way as that person did.)

(Even so.....)

Delbone had successfully connected Felli and Elsmau before her death. This meant together, the two of them held the power that equated Delbone's, or close enough to Delbone's.

(Or do you have the confidence in this situation to finish what that person wants to do but hasn't finished?)

Elsmau fell silent. Even Felli didn't have that confidence.

But they had no other choice. They must increase the accuracy of the Queen's strike. What Elsmau was concerned with was the person that Felli said was to open the hole.

(That's what you're looking for. Why not trust that a little bit?)

(True. I can only trust now.)

(Anyway, the flakes on the outside have already conveyed the message because of the rampage earlier on. This means we can still see the situation outside even if the hole is to close up again.)

(That's only if the opponent's weak spot hasn't changed.)

(Uh, either way we're racing against time.)

They had finished confirming their strategy. Elsmau had been working as an informant for the Mercenary Gang alone, and Felli had few chances to work with other Psychokinesists. Both of them lacked experience in teamwork and so they were unable to cover up the tension they felt.

"Hey."

The sudden voice made Felli's shoulders shake. The short shout contained pressure that one couldn't ignore.

That voice belonged to Lintence.

(What is it?)

"Let that girl speak."

He heartlessly chased out Elsmau. Felli calmed down a little before answering him.

(I'm here.)

"Ask that guy just how long does he plan to keep playing for."

(.....)

Felli couldn't answer. Perhaps this man already knew she wasn't a citizen of Grendan. That must be it. So she must speak with "the guy" that Lintence mentioned.

She felt that to be the biggest difficulty in this battle.

The situation continued to change. The feeling of collapse was obvious in the air. Chaos exploded in a split second in the river of live-bullets beneath his feet, and this made the collapse in the air turn more severe.

"Father!" Layfon called. He knew he had to fight in front of his father's mental preparation, but he felt that they shouldn't keep fighting in this situation.

"Not only Leerin is in this city! But also Toby and the other siblings!"

"I've already said so. If you want to do something, then open the path ahead with your katana!"

But father's words didn't change.

Layfon felt that he must do something now. He couldn't let this situation go on anymore.

(Fonfon.)

He saw the butterfly-shaped flake as he jumped in the gaps between live-bullets.

"Felli?"

He was shocked to hear this familiar voice, but he immediately caught the flake and stuffed it in his pocket.

"Felli, what is it? This flake is.....?"

(Delbone-sama is dead.)

"Eh?"

The shock from the words caused an opening in his fight.

Derek would never let this opening go. He closed the distance between the two in a split second. Two weapons clashed again. Layfon's head could have been flying in the air had his time of shock lasted longer. He shivered at Derek's murderous intent.

(Let me tell you the current situation.)

But Felli kept speaking in this situation, as if she didn't care. She never gave him the chance to protest. He could only listen in silence, and Derek was also forced to listen to her report.

Delbone's death. This last line of defense had collapsed. The enemies had infiltrated the city and were heading for the palace. Felli's voice was faint but it contained unusual energy.

(And what are you two doing in this situation? Layfon, is your purpose to fight this old man here? And you. Just what are you doing when your own city is in this situation?)

"....." "....."

The strength pressing down on the two katana showed no signs of weakening, but both fighters couldn't suppress the bitterness showing on their faces.

(I can tell from the conversation between you two that you're the head of the orphanage that Layfon was raised in.)

"....."

(But can you totally not consider your son's feelings just because you want to realize your daughter's wish?)

"....."

Derek kept silent as Layfon maintained his pose, keeping up the pressure on the blade and waiting for his reply or Felli's next question.

(..... I understand.)

Layfon didn't expect her to retreat like that. He was still putting pressure on the blade and Derek's strength remained strong on the katana. Layfon wouldn't reduce the pressure due to his own sense of shock.

(Then please hurry and make your decision. Otherwise everything would be too late. Not only might everyone in Grendan die, but Zuellni might also be destroyed.)

The live-bullets the two stood on were hit by Kei and became pieces as Felli spoke. This naturally ended the dilemma of the fight and Layfon leapt away.

"Felli?"

He could tell she was trying to persuade Derek, but why did she suddenly back off? It would have been great had she been able to persuade him.

(Fonfon.)

But she had seen through him.

(That's not possible.)

She curtly refused him.

"Eh?"

(I already knew it isn't possible. I only talked to him to confirm it.)

"Eh? Eh?"

Felli didn't seem to plan to unravel his confusion.

(There isn't much time left. The longer time you use, the heavier burden it'll be for the captain. Please don't forget this.)

"Just what's going on?"

She was once again talking about something he didn't understand. But..... To make the captain's burden heavier? He didn't understand, but he knew from the current situation that he couldn't keep wasting time like this. He was only clear about this part.

(Next is a message from Lintence. "Just how long does he plan to keep playing for". That was what he said.)

"Ha!"

Lintence's words gave him a bigger impact. It was impossible for him not to notice this fight. So did he understand everything?

(Get it? You're allowed the time for the next strike. Don't lose any more time than that..... and, the opponent seems to be preparing to end this in the next move.)

Layfon understood this. Derek was also leaping between live-bullets and keeping a distance from him, maintaining the same altitude as him. And he clearly sensed the huge whirl-like Kei concentrating around Derek. Perhaps Layfon already knew what he was planning.

Both sides wanted to win in the next move. They didn't have to think about their next move. They just needed to decide everything by clashing with all their might.

But.

But.....

(Fonfon.)

Psychokinesis was reading Layfon's expression. Felli's voice spread out like a drop of ink falling into clear water.

(That person wants to see.)

"....."

(He wants to see a son in you.)

Derek's Kei showed he was prepared. Layfon could feel the flow of that Kei in this battlefield was the existence of perfection. It was an art made for the elegant and intense final stroke of the pen.

(He wants to see how much you've grown and what your level of determination is.)

Derek's Kei painted the surrounding sky like wings grown with feathers. It was gathered to the Heaven's Blade in his hand, caused by the Kei vein that ran through his body and into the weapon. This was originally a very normal act for Military Artists, but it looked so very bright from Derek's strong determination. It was beautiful enough to shock one's heart.

(Your determination, the real you, that's what that person wants to see.....)

Felli continued.

Layfon couldn't move his gaze away from Derek. He raised his own Kei as he listened.

Derek moved.

Psyharden technique – Water Mirror.

(Are you going to just show that person your dishonest side..... ?)

Derek appeared before his eyes.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

Howling.

(I hate this you.)

Kei technique was released.

At the same time.

Psyharden technique – Flame Cut.

The techniques of the two clashed.

Equipment geared for outside city use wrapped around her entire body as she stood.

Nina was on the outside, on the outside of Zuellni, on the outside of Grendan, and landed on top of the monster. She had planned to do this even without Felli's contact. This was reckless but she knew she had nothing else to do but this.

(I hope Captain can attack the monster from the outside.)

Nina was thankful for Felli's timely request, but she hadn't explained the strategy. It seemed the contact was limited. The flake

had lost its strength after her contact and once more fell useless in Nina's hand. It seemed Felli wouldn't have a chance to talk to the Student President and Vance. And so Nina had prepared everything herself, sneaked into the equipment room and got ready for outside city fight. Nina accomplished this easier as all other Military Artists had to be on the ready for anything.

But she didn't want people to think she had lost it, resulting in Vance making a mistake for grasping hold of the wrong information and the Military Artists attacking the monster much earlier than needed. This wasn't what Nina wanted to see. That monster was concentrating on attacking Grendan and hadn't done anything to Zuellni, but it wouldn't ignore it long once it was attacked from this side.

So Nina had told what she planned to Sharnid and asked him to convey that message to Vance.

She didn't relay the message herself because she didn't want Vance to stop her. So she had only told Sharnid the necessary information and had then come here.

She knew what she was about to do was without a strategy.

All Heaven's Blade successors were fighting, but the situation was still in a dilemma. The addition of Nina probably wouldn't make any changes. But nothing would be solved if nothing was done.

(Please attack the monster with all of your strength, but please don't be reckless. If you were dead and Zuellni was damaged, either way, we will feel sad and regret.)

Felli had explained it clearly. She had been like that from the beginning, but her words were even colder than before. Perhaps she felt she really had to explain that point clearer.

Not one inch of space on the monster's stomach that was revealed in the flow of the air was smooth. The tips of Nina's shoes just barely fit into the monster's body as she stood. She held the iron whips. The weapon that only belonged to her, given to her by Zuellni. Perhaps there weren't any other weapons better suited to her than this pair of iron whips.

She would never let humiliation come to the iron whips in battle.

"Melnisc!"

(I will become your sharp sword, the intense flame to annihilate the enemy.)

The Haikizoku answered her call.

(No matter when and where, this has already become an unchangeable truth.)

Nina let Kei run through her body as she listened to Melnisc's answer. She locked her target on one of the ten heads on the stomach.

Combined Internal and External Kei variant – Raijin.

The catastrophic head that was lifted high watched Nina, but by then her world was already smothered in the smoke of high speed as she rushed for it.

The feeling of hitting the monster came to her hand as the monster's wailing pierced the sky. The crack caused by her attack should be smaller than the time when she first opened a hole in the monster's body. The monster's pain should also be less because Nina had used less power in this attack. Of course, the problem might not be on her attack. Perhaps the monster's head was harder than its body.

All the heads glared at her angrily because an important part of the body was hit. The other nine heads turned around to watch her . Nina felt pressure on her entire body.

Would the monster open its fangs to attack?

No.

"Um!"

Feeling a sense of distasteful prediction, Nina jumped and left her spot.

Lightning assaulted the space beneath her feet in the next moment. All the heads howled at the sky. At the same time,

another lightning strike fell from the dark clouds. It didn't fall on Nina but the huge pillar of lightning hit the monster's body and began spreading out.

"Is the cloud also part of this guy!"

Numbness ran through her body even though she had dodged the attack. She gritted her teeth at the sensation, landed and prepared her next strike.

Raijin.

The monster's body was regenerating, but Nina's attack overcame its regeneration speed and made the wound wider. It didn't look that big of a wound. If one were to compare it to a wound on Nina, it'd be the equivalent of a small wound made by the tip of a foot.

But she was certain it hurt.

It wasn't a fatal wound though. Either way, this level of a wound was nothing to a monster with unbelievable regenerative power.

"Damn."

She jumped to avoid another lightning strike.

"This is endless."

Was it not working to simply attack the monster's head? Nina pondered again.

Perhaps Felli wanted her to confuse the enemy. The monster had turned all of its attention to her. Perhaps this was what Felli had wanted.

A huge body mass.

A great regenerative power.

Even Heaven's Blade successors could only defend in front of this thing. Nina herself was also experiencing this point with her body.

Then she must find a way to kill this monster. This monster's weak point..... If this existed on this monster's body then she had to find it. This was what she had to do now.

The monster would counter-attack with lightning when one of its heads was hit. This really was a powerful counter-attack. She would die if she got hit, but it was very simple to read its attack. The counter-attack wasn't always aimed at her. Sometimes it didn't even land close to her. The lightning would spread across the monster's whole body. The attack wasn't anything to it.

"Next."

Nina changed her target and ran up the monster's long neck. She almost got thrown off the neck a number of times before she reached its head, but she finally made it to her destination. She swung the iron whips down at the eye that was larger than her own body. As expected, the scale in this place wasn't as hard. Nina released her Kei, using all of her strength. No matter how many

heads the monster had, this attack would give it quite some damage as long as it was a living thing.

But the end result was unexpected. The monster's reaction was very intense. Nina was thrown off the head because of it. But when she adjusted her pose in the air, the monster was already regenerating.

Not here.

Was it not the head then?

"Ok, next."

Nina's aim wasn't to defeat the monster. If she had insisted on defeating it, the battle would never end.

She landed, dodged the lightning strike and ran for the next head.

Someone saw it happen.

"She's doing something interesting."

The person who had retreated to Zuellni earlier than anyone else, Dixerio, was happily watching Nina's every movement.

"Ara, do you want to help her?" Nelphilia looked at him with a surprised expression. "You were wanting to defeat her yourself not so long ago."

"Weren't you the one who made me abandon that idea?"

"Is that so?" she was joking, passing off his complaint with a smile.

Fascinated attraction still lived in Nelphilia's eyes even though they were mere slits when she was smiling. Dixerio moved his gaze away and watched the monster and Nina's battle again.

"Seems to be chasing away a bee. The size is about right."

"Ala, the poison from the bee is incredible though."

"Exactly."

Dixerio held the huge metal whip on his shoulder.

"Are you really going? Aren't you thinking of heading there yourself?"

"It's not like my style to wait for the timing to come. Besides, I'm already here."

"Then go. I'll head there alone even if you are defeated."

Nelphilia took back her smile. The more she spent her time here , the weaker she became. The place that Saya told Leerin was a place that could realize all dreams. It was on the other side of this world, the place where the moon adorned the sky. It was hard to clearly see the hole in the sky because of the thick cloud cover. No, the hole was closed, that was why both Dixerio and her were still here.

"I'll leave you here and go if the hole opens up."

"Never mind. I think I'll head there on my own."

A mask appeared in Dixerio's hand. The mask of the Haikizoku, Velzenheim, had turned from blue to red after taking away the power of the fire god from Shante. It had greedily absorbed the power of the Wolf Faces and the existence of the fire god that was superior to them. Velzenheim now had the color that matched the title "The flame of the hungry wolf."

Dixerio put on the mask.

Power ran through him in a flash. The whirlwind created by the two negative powers of curse and revenge filled his body and spilled out of him.

Becoming a hideous flame.

Feeling the negative emotion writhing up his neck, Dixerio leapt. The pollutants could not invade his body as the intense flame was absorbing the pollutants and turning them into its own source of fuel. The flame became bigger once Dixerio left Zuellni's air shield.

"..... It can burn this well in air so thin, then it must burn even brighter on the other side," Nelphilia smiled with a finger on her lips as she watched him. "Ignasis. Perhaps you'll be burnt to ashes by the flame you created."

She lifted her head. On the other side of her gaze was the moon that was blocked by the heavy cloud cover. A smile that one would find tragic appeared on her face as she pondered the appearance of the moon.

Nina found out that something had happened. It happened after she attacked the third head. Her moves failed to defeat the monster, but she knew the monster was in pain from her blows. The more effective her attack was the closer she hit to the head. Of course, the eye was one of the attack points. It was easy to destroy

the eye, but the regenerative speed of the eye was also faster than anywhere else. She doubted whether this eye held the same function as a human's eye. Compared to this, the monster felt more pain from a blow that caused internal injuries. It seemed this monster's weak point was in a deeper area inside its body where Nina's attack couldn't reach. And so the monster hated injuries to its insides more than to its surface.

Then..... It happened while Nina was pondering.

A ball of gigantic flame appeared in the sky.

The flame that suddenly appeared from Zuellni gave one of the monster's heads a powerful assault. The monster's skin was peeled away. The scales bounced back. Even Nina could hear the noise from the attack from far away. The noise that sounded like lightning pierced the monster's head. The head fell back and toppled listlessly on the monster's abdomen.

"What was that?"

Nina's surprised voice filled her own helmet. If what she was feeling was the remnants of Kei, then this Kei was too savage. Its quality felt different from the wild Kei of the Heaven's Blade successors. Both types of Kei seemed similar but they were different.

The flame continued to expand as if it was to swallow its surroundings. Nina could only describe it as horror.

And this was especially true when she saw the wave riding the flame, or the person that was rampaging inside the flame. Nina shivered.

Dixerio.

But was this really him? She didn't feel that this was the Dixerio Maskane that she knew. He was more like the carefree Sharnid when she first met him. She found out he loved talking to himself when she met him the second time a few days ago.

And now.

The man wielding a huge metal whip, bringing with him the constantly changing flame stood before her, and she found it hard to link him with the Dixerio she knew. The Heaven's Blade successors turned around the definition of a normal Military Artist , but Dixerio was turning around the knowledge of what constituted a living being.

What was this ball of flame?

Nina didn't know. The City Police knew of Shante's special body. Some Alchemists knew too, but Nina had no idea.

No one in Zuellni knew that Shante was the fire god and that her body was made to be a weapon by the Wolf Faces. Zuellni herself was filled with secrets. No one knew that Zuellni was involved with the fate of this world.

The other being before her had taken Nina's attention. She stood spaced out, rooted on the spot.

The remnants of lightning attacked her. The lightning running across the monster's body captured her feet and she was thrown back to fall onto the monster's round abdomen. Nina continued to slide down as there was no handhold for her.

"Uh!"

She pierced the monster's body with her iron whips and used that point to jump up and stood again. The lightning shock coursing through her body had cleared her head.

".....How could I be looked after like that!"

Whatever kind of person Dixerio was, it was clear that he was helping her interfere with the monster. Then what she had to do now was the same as before. It wasn't possible to want everything as she wanted. If she wanted to continue to investigate the mystery of this world, then she would have to leave Zuellni once more.

"Right now, what I have to do is what I can do."

This was all that Nina wanted for now.

She gripped the iron whips and ran off again.

The surroundings of the palace had become a battlefield.

The sound of fighting and the footsteps of the monsters could be heard from the tallest tower in Grendan. Leerin's body kept shivering. She placed her hand on her chest and looked down out the window. Alsheyra and Saya were like statues, frozen on the spot. The queen's eyes were tightly closed but the girl of moonlight had her eyes wide opened.

Alsheyra was concentrating on the decisive timing that could arrive at any moment. As for Saya, Leerin didn't know what she was doing. Perhaps she was protecting Grendan.

With the monster that was covering the entire city, Durindana, perhaps Saya's power explained why this huge mass had yet to crush the city itself. It must be Saya's power to appoint an area that prevented anyone from entering. But Durindana was very strong. Even Saya could only prevent the huge body from entering. She could not stop the numerous live-bullets from invading the city.

The sound of chaotic but orderly footsteps was closing in on the palace, and the sound of the footsteps had slowed down somewhere. The Military Artists in the city were good at fighting, but they still couldn't completely stop the monsters from moving forward. They could only delay them.

Ahah.....

Leerin hugged her body, sighing. She understood a little now. The atmosphere of despair was invading her bit by bit. The instinctive desire to live was stirring in her heart, about to explode at any moment.

The meaning behind the number of twelve Heaven's Blade successors. The function of the right eye. The existence of the Queen.

Everything was linked, but Leerin didn't know the answer that lay behind that linkage. She could probably guess the answer, but there was nothing but the feeling of sadness.

The rib. Heaven's Blades were the rib of Airen. The Airen that was the moon and guardian of this world. The Airen that Saya loved. A part of the strong bones that made up a man's shell, the sharp and dangerous bone that revealed danger to humanity.

The Queen, the power Airen possessed. Dispersed across the world because of Rigzario. The Queen was the final form of that power, gathered once more.

And this was the right eye that Airen desired. This power was born from his will so to protect this world, to allow the princess to sleep eternally, the magical eye that could weave the wall of thorns . Airen's flesh that excluded his will. His everything was here. Then everything was gathered here because of the owner's will.

It was natural to gather here to protect Saya.

The Queen's birth on this earth, the gathering of the Heaven's Blade successors, Leerin standing here at this moment, everything was because of Airen's will.

But.....

She shook her head and chased away the thought surfacing in her mind. There was no fate here. He was only caught in this play. The stirrings left from her thoughts pained her. She boldly looked out the window of the tower and chased away those stirrings.

She looked at the sky through the window. She couldn't see that figure when Barmelin was in a rampage. But next time and the next time. Perhaps she could see that figure. That figure may appear before her after the monster's abdomen was pierced and the clouds were chased away.

She understood everything already.

And that was the time when she was to exercise her power.

The skeletons were closing in on the palace and in comparison, Grendan's Military Artists bravely fought on. They possessed above average fighting strength as individuals, but they could also fight together as a group. Tens of Military Artists released external Kei at the same time. They timed their moves so that the storm created by the Kei turned upward to create chaos in the enemies, destroying them. Still, this level of damage was very tiny for the whole of the skeletal enemies.

"No matter what, don't let them enter the palace!"

The commanding Military Artist howled at the skeletal soldiers climbing up the palace's wall and the rooftops of normal residential houses and heading straight for the palace.

But the skeletons did not stop moving. They ignored the wounds the Military Artists inflicted upon them and kept moving forward. Meanwhile, more live-bullets had landed as they slipped through the Heaven's Blades and so the skeleton's reinforcements were increasing constantly, and the number of reinforcements far surpassed the number being destroyed. All Military Artists spread out in Grendan had come to the palace after judging that the skeletons' aim was not the city's underground shelters.

But they still couldn't block them off.

Worry filled everyone.

And his voice rang out crisp and loud amidst them.

"..... Really, to leave this scene for me at such a playful time. My job isn't to wipe your ass. Really."

The sigh came from the front entrance of the palace. His long hair was bounded. His arms were filled with muscles because of his training. Silver plates shone.

The man's fist moved in an instant and hit the sky.

External Kei variant – Full power. Stab.

The released Kei bullet pierced through the skeletal group and ran in a straight line, forcefully splitting the enemies into two rows . The Military Artists cheered at the figure of the man who stepped into the enemy area in a relaxed manner.

"Savaris-sama!"

Savaris kept moving, ignoring the cheers. The skeletal army continued to move forward despite his attack. Savaris only headed forward and left the leftovers to the other Military Artists.

Blood seeped into the bandages wrapping his neck.

Lintence had sewn up the injury on his neck that Layfon made. Savaris had then received treatment in the hospital and his wound had been filled, but the vein that was cut hadn't been fully healed. One Full Power Stab was enough to open the wound again.

"This is the price of experiencing fun," he said to himself as he touched his wound.

"It seems I must act more wildly like Lintence-san," he said, shook away the blood on his hand and released a Kei move again.

External Kei variant – Absolute. Full Power. Stab.

Blood gushed like water from a fountain from his neck.

But the attack from the Kei was spreading from one skeleton to another. The skeletons fell like dominos.

"Well, let's do as much as I can."

Relaxed, he walked deeply into the army of skeletons, his upper body tainted with his own blood.

The sound of howling caused the sky to rumble.

The remnants from the clash of Kei rode the howls of the two and continued to spread, piercing the sky and shaking the monster's skin.

Psyharden technique – Flame Cut.

The result wasn't as simple as before, now released from two Heaven's Blades. Both persons' Kei bore fangs that attempted to swallow the other. The light of Kei blocked their vision. Layfon couldn't even see Derek who was in front of him.

All he felt was the pressure coming from the Heaven's Blade.

The feeling carried to his hands meant everything. Picked up by his foster father, raised up by him, his own traitorous act, the reconciliation, and the current fight. This may be a destined fate for both fighters. To survive by the blade. To fight on this world gone mad because of pollutants, and make oneself stronger. Perhaps this was written in one's fate.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

With force, Layfon shattered the thought "this can't be helped" that flashed through his mind. Even if this was a destined fight

between strong fighters, there must be an end. Lintence's words that Felli conveyed "Stop playing around" pressed down on him.

Not that he hadn't used his full power.

But he didn't want to kill his opponent. But right now, his adopted father also held the same amount of Kei and the Heaven's Blade. The result of victory was his opponent's death. This was the only road that Layfon foresaw. He was afraid that this would become reality, and this would mean he had really cut off his past. He would never forgive himself for that.

If he thought that the reason of this fight was Leerin's will, then he felt he might have got something wrong. He had already decided to see her and ask her about her true feelings. He had already made this mental preparation before he fought his adopted father. Even so, fear and uncertainty filled his heart. Determination was the preparation he made to tolerate the coming pain. It would not lessen the pain. He had already known this deeply when his siblings looked at him with hatred. Then wouldn't it have been better if he chose to run away? Somewhere inside his heart was mocking him. But he couldn't do it. He wanted to confirm for himself Leerin's decision. His heart felt like this for some reason. At the same time, a premonition flashed through him. Not only Leerin and Derek, but also his link with Toby and the other siblings would disappear if he accepted Derek's words. This was what he felt.

The feeling of flowing water in his hand made him afraid.

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!"

Howling.

Kei continued to rise.

He continued to increase his Kei and poured it into the Heaven's Blade, ignoring the term "limit". The two Kei exploded in the middle point of the two Heaven's Blades. The two Kei were glued together like a solid ball flying in a narrow space. Each leap would cause one to lose his balance. The pressure of Kei assaulted him, but tolerating the pain, he raised his Kei to press down on that pressure.

He could bear the intense pain on his flesh, but the pain in his heart was frightening. These feelings must be contradictory. He didn't understand. All he felt was fear. He would rather cut clean than be tied in these feelings, just like the time when he arrived at Zuellni. Why. Why didn't he want to lose what he had taken back with much effort?

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

Howling.

His eyes were white hot, but even if the tears were to flow, it would only be shattered instantly by his Kei. He had no other way to express his feelings than his howls.

To Derek. To his foster father. To his own father. To his own family.

Why did it turn out like this? He couldn't ask that question.

"Don't cry, stupid son."

He seemed to hear that from Derek.

One instant. Just one instant. He felt he saw Derek's smile in that gaze blocked by the flashes of light.

Perhaps this was just a hallucination. An indescribable feeling filled his mind. His eyes hurt because of the light. Perhaps everything was just his own imagination and wishful thinking.

Red dispersed in the world of white smoke. The color recovered in the next instant. Derek's body, standing on the other side of the Heaven's Blade, gushed red.

Gushing out from his Kei.

Layfon understood in an instant. The nervous system and the veins covering Derek's entire body could not sustain the sudden surge of Kei. The network ripped and from the rupture gushed the power that pained Derek.

Time seemed to slow. The Heaven's Blade in Derek's hands slowly lost power.

Wait. Stop!

Layfon ordered his own body. It was enough. The victor had been decided. His action wasn't necessary anymore. Stop. Stop. Stop!

But apparently he couldn't control his own body anymore. What controlled the movement of the blade in this situation was neither his body nor muscles, but the Kei embodied in the blade, exploding, controlling the blade at its own will and totally disregarding Layfon's wish.

The blade pressed down on Derek's Heaven's Blade and was about to enter father's body according to the path depicted in Layfon's mind. The tip of the blade would enter the flesh and travel from the left of the abdomen up to the right shoulder. It would soundlessly draw across Derek's body. Layfon seemed to be able to foresee the future of a few seconds later in his mind.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

Despair filled him.

But a miracle happened before it all became reality.

The two Heaven's Blades, weaved together, lost their shape. They became one and the blade in Layfon's hands became one Heaven's Blade. Only ripples were left of the Kei technique that had lost its blade.

Blood gushed from Derek's body as Layfon's father fell.

"Father!"

Live-bullets headed for the unconscious Derek. Layfon used the recoil of his Kei to descend speedily. He caught Derek and passed through Barmelin's river of bullets and landed on the roof of a nearby building.

"Father!" he called, but there was no reaction.

(He must have fainted because of blood loss. He isn't in immediate danger. The ambulance will arrive in 3 minutes.)

Layfon was at a loss as he listened to Felli's words. He watched his foster father. He couldn't have failed to see the wound on the left hand side of Derek's abdomen. He caused that injury, or one could say he caused it when he was thinking of killing his foster father.

(Layfon. Though this isn't the time to say it, there's something I have to ask you to do.)

"....."

(All Heaven's Blade successors are on the defense. The captain is fighting on the outside so you're the only person available.)

"..... What do you want me to do?"

(Open up a hole in the monster's body and keep it open for some time.)

"I see."

He lay Derek down and jumped out.

Did he have to do that? Did he have to do that in order to see Leerin and confirm her thoughts? To defeat Derek with his katana. Did he have to do that?

What had happened to Leerin?

He had to confirm it.

The pain in his heart felt like his skin was being peeled off. Blood was gushing from him without ceasing. Did he have to do that for the present step he was taking? Did he have to tolerate that pain so that he could stand before her?

Did Leerin have the same level of preparation? Was what was happening now require her to have this level of preparation?

The monster covering the entire city. Was it because of it? Whether it was about that event or this.

"All because of you!"

Layfon passed through the river of bullets again and restored the Heaven's Blade. The appearance of Wolfstein was the same as he had remembered. Layfon felt nothing but hatred for the feeling of it in his hands. The result of the battle became like this because of Wolfstein.

He held it backhandedly with a pose ready to throw something. Fury turned into Kei and was poured into the Heaven's Blade. Disappear together with this monster!

"Hoooooooooooooooooooooo!!"

The color of Kei enveloped his entire body and became a circle of light. Fury changed the color of Kei into scalding red.

External Kei variant – Rumbling Sword.

Fury was thrown out along with Kei. The Heaven's Blade became a light bullet of red that stabbed into the monster's skin. The entirety of Grendan shook from the shaking of the explosion. The remnants of the Kei technique destroyed all surrounding live-bullets.

The hole made by force was revealed after the smoke cleared.

The gigantic moon gazed down at Layfon on the other side of the hole.

The colossal abdomen covering Grendan was shaking, and even faster than the shaking, the monster was regenerating.

Layfon took out the Adamantium Dite from his weapon harness as he fell. He inserted the special Dite into the slot in the Adamantium Dite, and the changes he expected took place.

Steel threads.

Thousands of Steel Threads appeared from the handle he was holding, and they began to shred down the cells regenerating from the wound. Kei flowed to the ground and started to burn up the monster's flesh. Layfon wasn't thinking of controlling the amount of Kei anymore. The insane Kei was cutting apart the monster, burning it and swallowing it. Layfon wasn't thinking of control because of his fury. The Steel Threads had turned red and hot even though the Adamantium Dite had a greater capacity than the

Sapphire Dite. The Steel Threads released by the Layfon in the sky had turned bright red.

He felt the sense of danger immediately. Layfon poured forth the last spurt of Kei and tossed away the weapon.

The last explosion burnt away the flesh that was sealing off the hole. He speedily took out the Sapphire Dite, restored it and released the Steel Threads again.

But the kei he poured into the Dite was a lot less than before. Felli didn't say how long he had to keep the hole open. No, it was better that he hadn't asked. If she had said one minute, he might have relaxed in the last ten seconds. Besides, he felt that he couldn't calm his fury if he didn't let it out now.

But the capacity of the Sapphire Dite that allowed it to counter the regenerative power of the monster was much lower. Layfon was causing injuries in the monster's body rather than keeping the hole open. The hole was not big enough for the regenerative power to wane. The effort of the Sapphire Dite was useless.

In that case.....

Only one Dite was left in the weapon harness, the Shim Adamantium Dite. He reached for it and passed through the hole with the steel threads to attack the monster from the other side of the air shield. There was no other way. He wasn't scared of the pollutants burning his body. The only feeling filling him now was fury.

But a change happened faster than his determination.

Leerin saw the moon.

The moon saw Leerin.

It's coming.

The moon appeared in her gaze again as she thought. She looked at it with her head lifted. On it was Nina and the figure of the mysterious man, weaved with fire, and the ten heads that were fighting them.

Through the Haikizoku, Nina was fighting the monster with the mysterious man. They were able to distract their enemy, but their combined attacks did nothing to unearth the monster's weakness. Nano Celluloid. The extremely tiny existence was hiding somewhere. It wasn't because Nina and the mysterious man did not possess enough power. It was because the scale of the enemy was too large.

This was the time for Leerin to do what she had to do.

She watched the moon, what the moon could see – the entire body of the monster.

Her gaze was fast narrowing.

The monster was trying to block off Leerin's gaze to the moon, and that effort wasn't slow. It wanted to close off the hole in an instant. And Leerin saw the figure of Layfon near the hole, as if the

steel threads were pulling him around. He was keeping that hole open.

He had opened it and was keeping it open.

Her chest hurt. She didn't want to see him here at all, but he had created this last chance. Leerin must not waste the chance he had created.

She watched the moon, the thing that the moon saw.

The monster was reflected. Leerin concentrated on her right eye and used the power in it. She used the thorns to create the flower garden protecting the princess' slumber, and marked every interference with the mark of the grave.

The power existed for this purpose.

Felli also looked at the monster's figure again. The power of Psychokinesis had spread out because of the hole Layfon opened. Delbone's flakes were once connected and activated.

This was the last big job. There might not be a chance to turn this situation around if they failed. Felli quickly confirmed the situation as she bore the pain in her stomach.

Nina was fighting along with the mysterious man in flame. Felli gave up trying to confirm the monster's body but instead concentrated on its cells that reacted to the two's assault. It felt a waste of time to try to calculate the number of things moving

underneath the monster's skin. The movement of each unit was difficult to explain like that of a messy current. Just thinking of separating each unit and finding out the source of each of them was difficult enough.

(Um.....)

(It seems this will take quite some time to finish.)

Elsmau said in despair.

But they didn't have that much time. Felli bite her lips as she processed the vast amount of information in high speed. Thinking heated her brain. Her consciousness seemed to have flown away. She could only sustain her own consciousness through the pain in her lips. Her lips split and traces of blood appeared.

The hole continued to shrink. Layfon was nearing his limit.

She must hurry. Hurry. Hurry. Hurry.

But the huge thing kept flowing and changing as if to mock her effort. Only the sense of exhaustion kept increasing. Anxiety filled her chest and made breathing difficult. It was hard enough to just remain standing.

(Are there..... Are there any huge changes happening?)

Elsmau said painfully as if she was drowning.

If there was another way. Perhaps they didn't have to attack their opponent's weak point. It'd have been great if there was

another way to defeat it..... All Felli could think of was the combined attack of the Heaven's Blade successors. That couldn't be done right now. It would be a huge gamble to bet on that move.

Was there another way? Though it didn't happen as Felli and Elsmau expected, their anticipation had been met.

The air suddenly shook.

The changes happened as if the air had suddenly lost its weight. Inside the changes embodied a certain will and a painful scream. It forcefully assaulted Felli, Elsmau and the ones fighting the monster, Nina, Dixerio and Layfon.

(What is it?)

Felli's question remained a question to everyone else except Layfon.

"..... Leerin?"

Only Layfon felt her taste in the scream in the air. Her painful scream at the sky cut through him.

The changes took place in the hole that Layfon opened.

Bubbles rapidly appeared like the surface of boiling water on the skin of the monster, in the hole that Layfon had opened.

Compared to the black skin of the monster, the bubbles were white with something dark inside. Like an eyeball.

It didn't feel substantial. The balls were covering the walls of the hole and preventing the monster from regenerating. Creepy was the word to describe it. And then the number of eyeballs continued to increase.

The monster's cells became eyeballs.

The eyeballs grew to the outside of the hole. Layfon could no longer tell from his bare eyes where the eyeballs would stretch to. But numerous eyeballs were watching him as if they belonged to Leerin. He didn't doubt this intuition for some reason.

Nina saw the changes too. She saw it after hitting one of the monster's heads.

"What..... is that?"

The things spreading out from the monster's abdomen. They were getting closer to her after she landed on the monster's neck, and that was the time when she confirmed the things were eyeballs.

The eyeballs spread up to the head that Nina had hit.

Graaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!

A sudden howl and her mad dash. Nina almost got thrown off the monster's back because of the sudden violent movement of the head. She backed away. The monster had never reacted so strongly no matter how much Nina hammered at it and how long Dixerio's flame heated it. Right now, it was thrashing around like it was trying to sweep away the school of flesh-eating fish on its back. Lighting fell on it in torrents.

But the eyeballs cared naught and kept growing in number.

"Wu."

She barely withstood the pain, using Kongokei to defend. The monster's rampaging had gone beyond what was normal. There was nothing more Nina could do. The words "retreat temporarily" floated in her mind then she began to plan her escape to Zuellni.

Ugruuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!!

All ten heads howled at the sky. The cloud cover dispersed because of the voices and so one could now see the moon behind it . The sun should have been out according to the time. In reality, sunlight filtered into the city after the cloud was chased away, but the moon ignored it all and was still hanging in the sky.

A hole suddenly appeared on the moon. It pierced the formless sky. A hole in black was exuding seven colors. The ten heads' howling increased in volume as if they were praying for something. The remaining dark cloud dispersed in the midst of lightning that were adorning the monster's body.

What did the monster want to trigger? Something that was different from all its past actions. It must be wanting to summon something ominous from the hole that had once appeared in Zuellni's sky.

Nina knew she had to do something. She readied her pose but she couldn't think of anything she could do.

At this time.

"I've been waiting for this moment!"

The voice came from Dixerio.

The flame writhing up the monster's body changed direction because of his voice. It headed straight for the sky and flew into the hole like a beast dashing out after confirming its target.

Something was wanting to come through from the other side of the hole, but Dixerio's flame had already covered it up before Nina could see its face.

Dixerio leapt over her as if he was running on flame. His masked face truly looked like a beast's. And darkness followed closely behind him. The white face floating in the dark smiled at her.

"Nelphilia....."

The girl of night whom Nina had seen in Zuellni followed Dixerio to the hole as if she was riding the beast of flame. The two

of them entered the flame-enveloped hole, and what Nina saw in the last moment was the flash of light destroying both flame and darkness, Dixerio's metal whips, the fangs of lightning.

There was not a sound. Only a formless attack hit her and then hammered the head as if it was searching for it. The head toppled and fell onto the monster's abdomen.

And then Dixerio and Nelphilia disappeared into the hole together.

The eyeballs continued to grow in number until they covered the monster's entire body.

The lightning raining down constantly was destroying the flakes. The impact that was fatal on Delbone's aged body made Felli kneel .

But she saw it.

(You saw it.)

(Saw it.)

Elsmau was in pain too.

The continuous growth of eyeballs, this unusual phenomenon, had released the mechanism controlling the internal organs of the monster. The units flowing inside the body dropped in number. What were left flowed to the central area and was then vomited out. Everything was very obvious now.

This was the place.

Elsmau reported the information to the Queen.

Felli then told Layfon and Nina to leave the monster as quickly as possible.

Alsheyra knew the monster's weak point.

"Saya, protect Leerin."

"I understood."

No one knew if she had heard Saya's reply. Alsheyra immediately opened her tightly closed eyelids, and this action alone was enough to make the air shake, and the wall collapsed because of it.

On the corner of her gaze was the screen projected by Delbone's flake. It depicted the monster's weak point in detail. The movements of the dot of light inside this colossal body were complicated, but the dot seemed to be having difficulty moving around, as if it was somehow restricted.

Alsheyra's gaze swept across the screen and then she took one step forward. The floor and the entire palace shook from just one step.

The shaking didn't stop at the boundary of the palace. It had spread throughout the entire Grendan.

Just one step.

She had only taken one step.

Not only Savaris, fighting at the mouth of the palace, felt it. Barmelin defending the city's sky; the Heaven's Blade successors protecting the outer-edge; Layfon who had given up keeping the hole open; and Nina, retreating back to Zuellni on the other side of the air shield. They all felt it.

Everyone believed what was about to come. Everyone believed this attack would turn the situation around.

"Grendan!"

The wall of the tower collapsed because of Alsheyra's voice. The roof was blown off. Alsheyra's figure appeared in the city, in the battlefield. The city damaged in the battle was spread out before her, but she couldn't see it. She had lifted her head with determination and was watching the sky, watching the culprit that had caused this.

(I obey!)

Grendan replied. A beast with four legs and one strand of long fur emerged behind her. The Haikizoku that was moving this entire city in place of Saya, guiding it to an endless fight with filth monster was standing behind her.

She reached out for Grendan. Nothing needed to be said. Grendan knew what she wanted just from her simple movement.

(My sharp teeth will become yours until they shatter.)

Flashes of light enveloped her hand and then gathered into a ball. An explosion without sound and impact turned the light into a piece of gold metal. The Haikizoku's power gathered in her hand and materialized.

It was a lance with two sharp heads.

"Of course."

She replied shortly. Her breathing had heated up. The energy flowing in her had been honing itself and waiting for this moment to be released. The energy in her would flow out for the purpose of destruction with every moment of her body. Her hand, her head, her foot. The air around her twisted because of the heat. The walls and the floor were painted red by it and the palace kept shaking. That heat would have burnt Leerin's entire body, the wind pushing her out of the building and her meeting her death in the fall, if she wasn't protected by Saya.

Alsheyra gripped the lance. The Kei inside her reacted to her action and poured itself into the weapon. The weapon, formed by the body of an Electronic Fairy, surpassed a Heaven's Blade..... It was a weapon that could contain an immense amount of Kei. Nina's iron whips were an example.

The Queen held the lance and leaned back, ready to throw.

The Kei in the lance with two heads made it shine.

Alsheyra threw it.

The lance traced a path of white in Grendan's sky and it made a sudden change of angle when it reached a certain point. It headed straight up. At the movement, cracks spidered out from where Alsheyra was standing and the floor started to collapse. The cracks

spread across the tiles and even Leerin and Saya were swept away. Alsheyra's figure also disappeared in the falling debris.

During this time, the lance arced over the sky of the embattled city in unusual silence. It sailed through the air shield and easily pierced the monster's skin. It cut through one of the ten heads and headed straight for its destination.

The silence was shattered in the next moment.

It looked like water was draining into a trench to those looking from inside Grendan. The small hole opened by the lance suddenly became a whirlpool, sucking up the entire body of the monster as the whirlpool became bigger and bigger. The monster was swallowed in a split second and subsequently, the green sky returned. The ten heads had disappeared along with the dark clouds. The moon that had been insisting on its own existence had also slowly disappeared into the azure sky like a hallucination, melting into the firmament.

Neither explosion nor loud noise happened. Everything collapsed and was annihilated in a flash, disappearing into who knew where.

Everything ended in this moment.

Everything had ended. Everyone was at a loss as it all happened too suddenly. Out of all of them, only Layfon paid no attention to it.

The End.

Epilogue

She brushed the debris off herself and saw the blue sky stretching endlessly before her. She smelled the air after rain, but there was still dust everywhere. Still, the air smelled of rain.

"....."

Leerin didn't know what to say as she watched the sky. Alsheyra had pulled her out of the debris. Everything looked very tragic, but Saya had protected her so Leerin was not injured. Even her clothes showed no stain.

And Saya had wordlessly handed her something when she emerged from the wreckage.

The eyepatch.

"Ah, thanks."

She wasn't clear on where she had put it after taking it off. Perhaps she lost it somewhere and Saya had picked it up for her, or perhaps this was a new eyepatch. She couldn't tell.

The eyepatch was proof of her unusual right eye.

She couldn't return to her old self now that she was wearing it.

So.....

"It's not possible, Layfon....." she said to Layfon who was standing opposite her.

"Leerin!"

He ran without heed for the palace after seeing it collapse. He was worried for Leerin's safety and he wanted to save her. His wish for her true feelings, the disappearance of the monster, the passing of the danger, none of these things mattered to him. All he wanted was to see Leerin. He shivered when he saw the wreckage that was the palace and thought she was inside it.

He saw the Queen and an unfamiliar girl climb out of the debris , followed by Leerin just when he wanted to ask for Felli's help.

"Why did you come?"

"Why....."

He was speechless at her question.

No, he knew she was refusing him. Was she doing this for his sake? Or not. He understood Leerin's feelings when he saw the mirror in his father's face that was full of murderous intent.

Still, he had arrived.

He must say something, something..... If he didn't, then everything he had done so far was worthless. Derek's injury and his own tolerance of the painful memories would have all become worthless.

To say something, something.....

Perhaps this was the only chance left to him but his heart couldn't say anything.

"You shouldn't be standing here anymore," Leerin said coldly. She didn't want to give him a chance.

"Your power isn't omnipotent, so you're not necessary to this city and to me."

"Leerin....."

"I'm happy that you came, but it's enough. Why didn't you return when you saw father?"

"I!"

He wanted to overcome the wall that was blocking him with many words. He called. If he didn't, he probably wouldn't be able to say anything. It must not be like this..... Was she wearing a blindfold because her eye was injured? It made her face look different from his memory. She was very calm, as if she could calmly accept everything no matter what he was to say.

"I, I want to know your thought. Not father's, but from your mouth. If there's anything I can do....." he said as he slowly walked over to her. His life would have been like a candle in the wind if the Queen wished it, so it didn't matter that he held no weapon. He tossed away the Sapphire Dite and slowly approached her with arms opened.

"If there's anything I can do. If there's anything I can do for you, I....."

"For me?" she walked towards him too.

Her expression of somberness was unchanging.

"For me? For me, you'd stay in Grendan? You'd fight the enemies for me?"

"Yes."

"Why. Why do you want to fight for me?"

"That's....."

"Because we're siblings? Because we're both orphans, that we both grew up in the same orphanage? But I already know of my identity and who my parents are. My father is Herder Eutnohl. My mother is Meifar Stadt. I'm not a Marfes anymore. I'm now Leerin Eutnohl, a member of Grendan's three royal families. Will you still protect me? I'm not part of your family anymore."

"I....."

"Layfon. Who am I to you?"

Layfon felt that what he wanted to say was becoming more and more incomprehensible. All his words in his heart had lost meaning before her words. Why did he want to protect her and save her? His words had suddenly lost their meaning.

Something was being dug out.

One word was being slowly dug out after everything was taken from him.

He gripped it with determination enough to face death. He thought everything would turn positive if he could grab hold of it, and he felt it was a very simple word. As long as he took hold of it, he felt that she would smile no matter how somber she was, no

matter that she was showing him a cold expression he had never seen before. Perhaps time would return to the past days of his living with Toby and Derek.

But nothing had caught up.

Leeirn's face appeared before him.

"Leerin."

"....."

She didn't say anything. She just placed her hands on his cheeks . The feeling of her fingertips conquered his face. Her eyes moved near, including the eyepatch. She was so close that he could even see the pattern on it.

Their lips overlapped.

Layfon couldn't react because it was all too sudden. His brain turned blank. His fingers shook. And as expected, what he wanted to say was now in the mouth of his throat.

But he didn't say it.

The impact was crashing against his chest.

He sensed he was being pushed back. He sensed he was looking at her with his head lifted. After being pushed back, he was sitting on the floor, spaced out, thinking of the event that had just occurred.

The somberness was gone from Leerin's face. Her left gaze was filled with fury and contempt. Words of scorn came from her lips that had been forcefully overlapped with his.

"A man who can't even embrace."

She turned her back on him and walked back to the Queen. Layfon finally stood up and reached out a hand to her, but the Queen was suddenly before him, blocking his path.

And from behind him.

"Your Majesty, are you all right?"

It was Kanaris' voice. There was the sound of footsteps of numerous Military Artists too. One part of the palace's Military Artists had arrived.

They saw Layfon.

"Layfon Alseif!"

He didn't know who howled out his name. It wasn't Kanaris, so it must be one of the Military Artists.

"What are you doing here!"

Layfon didn't know why they were angry. Leerin slowly left, followed closely by the girl of night, and then behind them was the Queen. Kanaris also left with them.

Layfon was left rooted on the spot, unable to move.

Someone took hold of his shoulder and many hands grabbed him. They probably thought he wanted to do something to the Queen. Someone kicked his knees from behind and made him kneel. He felt pressure on his wrists. His head was on the ground. Layfon hadn't thought of resisting. He just took it all in silence.

He didn't understand why he was released. Wailing and impact suddenly filled his surrounding. Freedom was obtained and someone then pulled him up and jumped to a place far away.

"What are you doing? For someone like you."

He finally realized it was Claribel. The two of them were in a place far away from the wreckage of the palace.

He finally realized after arriving at this far away place of the word he wanted to grasp. It now revealed its vivid appearance.

Ahah.

"Why only now....."

He knew his understanding came too late.

Layfon finally realized that he liked Leerin.

"Claribel?"

Leerin stopped at Alsheyra's word, a word full of doubt.

The commotion was far behind them.

Light suddenly gathered before her chest when she stopped walking. It gathered into a form.

A Dite.

Wolfstein.

The name of the Heaven's Blade successor given to Layfon. He had been holding it all this time. The Heaven's Blade that was thrown out in order to open a hole in the monster's body had now returned by its own will.

"....."

She silently held the Dite. Her chest felt like it was being ripped apart. Perhaps she would have felt better if blood could flow. Even if she was to die.

But she didn't want to die. She didn't want to escape from her pain.

"Hey," Alsheyra said. "If it pains you so much to want to cry, isn't it better to put it aside? It's good that you don't want him to fight. This way, you can heal him."

Crying?

Me?

"What are you saying, Your Majesty?"

She hadn't felt anything flow down her left eye. Not wanting him to fight. He shouldn't have been chosen to fight in this situation.

"No. I was just mocking myself for being stupid. A stupid sister who can't leave her younger brother. I was laughing so much that tears fell. Is there a problem?"

Alsheyra didn't say more after hearing her words.

Zuellni recovered after this. The broken leg had regenerated. Looking at Zuellni slowly leaving was like watching Layfon leave her. Leerin pulled her gaze away.